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Slavery & the Founding



Worked Example

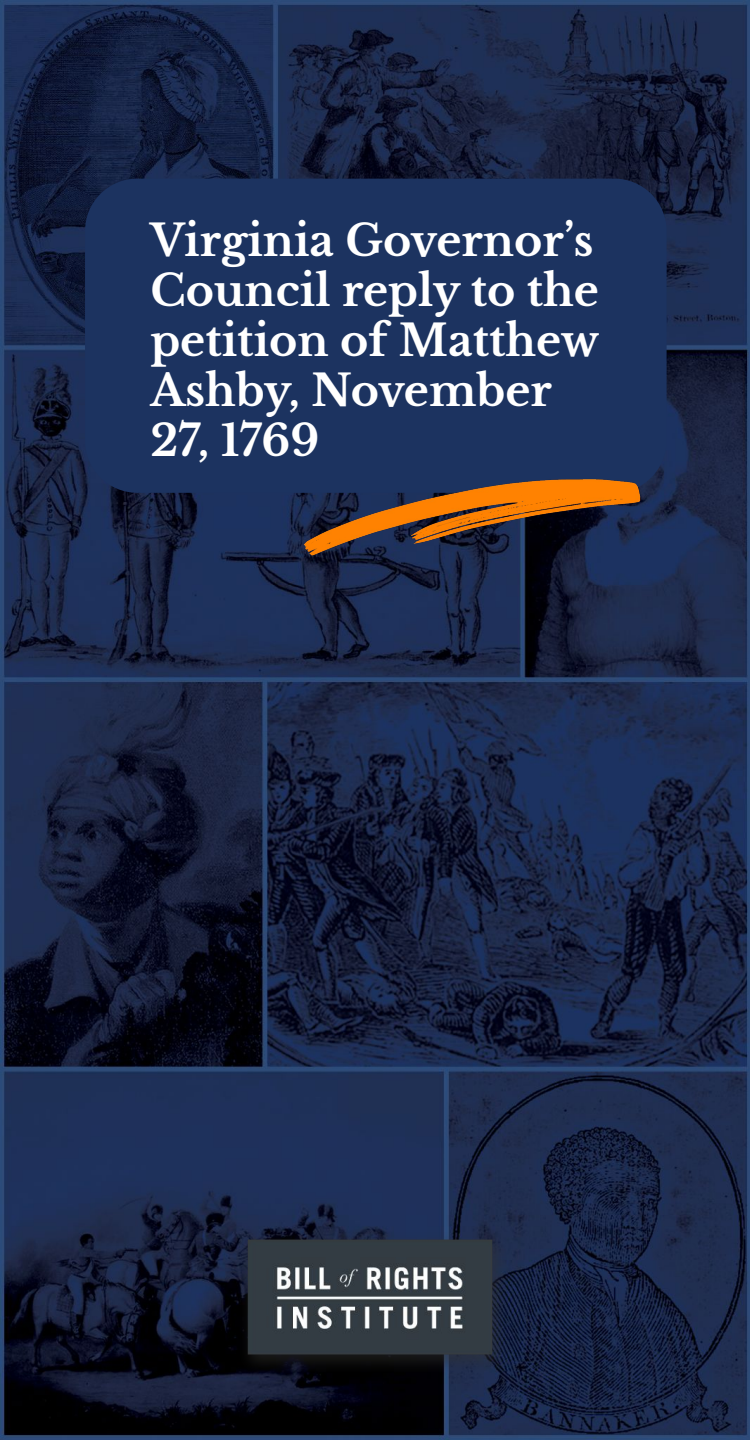
Virginia Governor's Council
reply to the petition of Matthew
Ashby, November 27, 1769

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How to annotate a primary source



Virginia Governor's
Council reply to the
petition of Matthew
Ashby, November
27, 1769

1. Refer to the guiding questions and “I can” statements.
2. Preview the essential vocabulary.
3. Closely read the title.
4. Don't skip the introduction.
5. Closely read the text.
6. Summarize what you learned from the source.

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Refer to the guiding question and “I can” statements

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How did enslaved and free Blacks resist the injustice of slavery during the colonial era?

This source will help me answer this guiding question.

- I can articulate how slavery was at odds with the principle of justice.
- I can explain how enslaved men and women resisted the institution of slavery.
- I can create an argument supported by evidence from primary sources.
- I can succinctly summarize the main ideas of historic texts.

When I am done with this source, I should be able to do these four things.

Preview the essential vocabulary

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Essential Vocabulary

Petition	A formal written request, typically to a government or government official.
Indentured servants	Men and women who signed a contract or were indentured 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 that 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. Click here to find out how much this would equal in today's currency.
Manumit	To release legally from slavery.

Refer to these terms as you read. They are provided before the source to help you decode what it says.

Read the title closely

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Virginia Governor's Council reply to the petition of Matthew Ashby, November 27, 1769

I know this will deal with the colony of Virginia.

This date predates the American Revolution, so this comes from the colonial period.

This is one of the essential vocabulary terms. I know this is an official request made to a court.

I expect to see a formal response from the Virginia governor to some sort of request made by a man named Matthew Ashby during the colonial period.

Don't skip the introduction.

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Building Context

In 1619, when the first Africans were sold in the colony of Virginia, they were slaves who were unfree and worked alongside white **indentured servants**. Some of the slaves, however, were freed.

Slavery became **codified** or written into law over the next few decades. By 1662, the colony of Virginia passed a hereditary slave law declaring the child of an enslaved mother, regardless of the status of the father, would inherit the enslaved status of his/her mother. This law (and others over the next 40 years) created a hereditary, race-based system of coerced or forced labor in the colony:

black skin color became equated with enslavement and inferiority. Matthew Ashby was born to a white mother, an indentured servant named Mary Ashby, and an unknown man of African descent.

As a **mulatto** child born to a white mother, Matthew Ashby was required by law to serve as an indentured servant until the age of thirty-one. His mother was also required to pay a fine of 15 pounds to the parish church. After being indentured for 30 years, Matthew Ashby worked in

Williamsburg, Virginia, as a free man.

I know that the petitioner, Matthew Ashby, was a free man of mixed-race that officially petitioned the Virginia Governor.

Vocabulary words are bolded; I should refer to them as I read.

The first 5 sentences provide broad context for slavery in colonial Virginia and how that system became hereditary and tied to race.

These last 4 sentences give me some information about Matthew Ashby, the person making the petition.

Closely read the source, making notes as you go.

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On the **Petition** of Matthew Ashby, a free **Mulatto** setting forth that he had two Children by his present wife Ann Ashby, while she was a Slave to Samuel Spurr, that he brought her and the two Children of the said Spurr for **one hundred and fifty pounds**, that he now has two children alive by her John and Mary, that she has been a faithful and diligent Wife ever since marriage, and praying that he may be permitted to set her and his Children free; the Board being satisfied therein, were of opinion, that the said Ann, John and Mary were deserving of their freedom, and it was order'd that the said Matthew Ashby have leave to **manumit** and set them free.

Matthew Ashby's race and status as a free man is officially noted.

Matthew Ashby had a wife named Ann, and two children, John and Mary. Ann was enslaved, therefore her children were enslaved by Virginia law.

Matthew Ashby was given permission to manumit or free his wife and children.

Matthew Ashby purchased his wife and children from their slaveholder for a large sum of money and is now requesting that they be freed.

Summarize what you learned from the source.

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1. In colonial Virginia, slavery was hereditary and tied to race. This was codified or written into law over time.
2. Manumission was possible but required petitioning the colonial government.
3. Free and enslaved Blacks not only interacted with each other, but established meaningful community and connection with each other (e.g., Matthew and Ann Ashby married and had a family) .
4. Matthew Ashby paid a large sum of money for his family, showing his commitment to their freedom and that he was financially successful in his own right.