

Primary Source:

George Washington's Last Will and Testament, July 9, 1799

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

- I can connect actions taken by African Americans during the Revolutionary War to an understanding of natural rights of equality and justice.
- I can summarize the main ideas of historical text.
- I can create an argument supported by evidence from primary sources.

Building Context

Some enslaved African Americans found themselves pulled into the American Revolution due to the situation of their masters. One such example is William Lee, the enslaved **valet** of George Washington. As a valet or personal servant, Lee was responsible for many personal tasks for Washington, from delivering messages to helping him dress. Lee served by Washington's side throughout the entire Revolutionary War and remained enslaved following the Patriot's ultimate victory. In his will, Washington specifically mentioned Lee and his "faithful service" to him throughout the conflict.

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<https://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-sources-2/article/george-washingtons-last-will-and-testament-july-9-1799/>

"to my **Mulatto** [mixed race] man William (calling himself William Lee) I give immediate freedom; or if he should prefer it (on account of the accidents which have befallen him, and which have rendered him incapable of walking or of any active employment) to remain in the situation he now is, it shall be optional in him to do so: In either case however, I allow him an annuity of

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thirty dollars during his natural life, which shall be independent of the **victuals [food] and cloaths he has been accustomed to receive** [by law enslaved were required to receive food and clothing from their masters], if he **chuses** [chooses] the last alternative; but in full, with his freedom, if he prefers the first; & this I give him as a testimony of my sense of his attachment to me, and for his faithful services during the Revolutionary War.”

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

1. What did George Washington promise William Lee in his will? Why did he do this?

2. What action did William Lee take during the Revolutionary War?

3. What evidence does this document provide about the role of African Americans in the Revolutionary War?

4. Does this document provide any evidence of an understanding of natural rights? Explain.