

A yellow spotlight beam shines down from the top center of the image, illuminating the text below. The background is a solid blue color.

SPOTLIGHT
on History

A stylized, unrolled scroll with a brown border and a white interior. The scroll is unrolled from the left and right sides, with the ends curling up. The text is written in a black, serif font on the white surface of the scroll.

**James Armistead Lafayette:
An American Patriot**

Who Was James Armistead?

James Armistead was an African-American born into slavery around 1748 on the Virginia plantation owned by his enslaver, William Armistead.

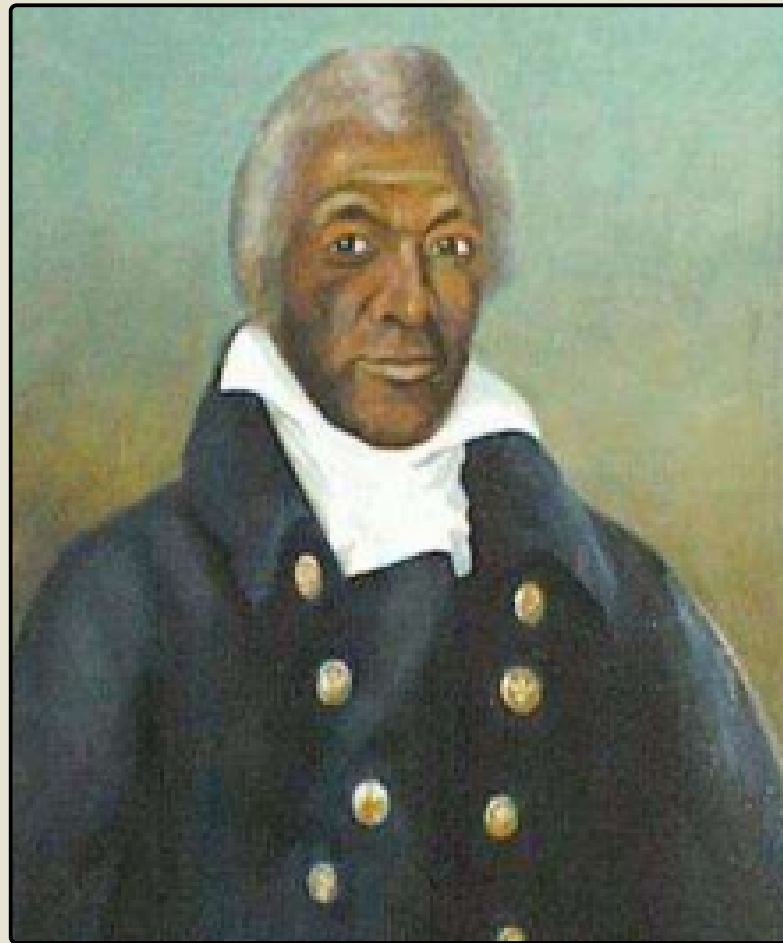
At the start of the Revolutionary War, the Continental Army and their Patriots prepared to fight against the British and their Loyalists for their rights and freedom.

As the war began to heat up, James requested and received approval from his owner to serve in the Continental Army.

In 1781, James volunteered in the Continental Army's French allies under the command of General Marquis de Lafayette.

Primary Source:
Portrait of James Armistead Lafayette

Courtesy of Virginia Museum of History and Culture



James Going Undercover

Under the instructions of General Lafayette, James acted as a spy for the Patriot cause.

He pretended to be a runaway servant who hoped to join the British Army.

James joined the service of the infamous Benedict Arnold after he turned traitor against the Patriots and switched to the British cause.

DID YOU KNOW...

Marquis de Lafayette (pronounced Mar-kee day La-fay-et) was born in 1757 in France.

He helped France ally with the Patriots during the American Revolution. He served directly under and became good friends with General George Washington. They were such good friends, Lafayette even named his son George Washington!

Gaining the Trust of the British

How was James able to gain the complete trust of the British officers he served?

James became the local guide to the Virginia area, offering valuable wisdom into how the British troops could deploy across the land.

Benedict Arnold and his fellow British officers were impressed with James's guidance.

At the same time, the British were eager to squash all Patriot efforts for rebellion as quickly as possible, and so the British Army welcomed any individual - both enslaved and free - into their ranks with the hope that they could win by outnumbering the Patriot rebels.

DID YOU KNOW...

In 1775 the British Governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, was so afraid of a Patriot attack on Williamsburg, Virginia that he set up an official document, or Proclamation, that became known as Dunmore's Proclamation.

His Proclamation claimed that all servants and enslaved individuals would be able to gain their freedom if they joined the British army.

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 PROCLAMATION.

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 Sub-
jects 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 Courfe
of the Civil Law is unable to effect; I have thought fit to issue this my Pro-
clamation, hereby declaring, that until the aforesaid good Purposes can be ob-
tained, I do in Virtue of the Power and Authority to ME given, by His MAJES-
TY, 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 re-
turn 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 indentured 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 salu-
tary Purposes, by Officers properly authorized to receive the same.

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

DUNMORE.

(GOD save the KING.)

Primary Source Document: Dunmore's Proclamation

Courtesy of Virginia Museum of History and Culture

James As A Double Agent

Because of his valued reputation among British soldiers, James was able to move to other British military camps, where officers openly shared their battle strategies and military secrets to him.

Unusual for enslaved individuals at the time, James was able to read and write.

Because he could write, he drafted notes that were passed to fellow Patriot spies and shared directly to General Lafayette himself.

James became a double agent: pretending to be a spy for the British while feeding them false information and sharing British secrets to the Patriots.

The Battle of Yorktown

James's espionage gained important intelligence, or intel, that led the Patriots to victory at the Battle of Yorktown.

James sent a note to General Lafayette about the plan to attack Yorktown.

Lord Cornwallis, the head of the British Army, gathered 10,000 British troops from Portsmouth to Yorktown for an attack.

With James's intel shared, General Lafayette coordinated with General Washington on building a blockade, or barrier, of soldiers and ships to cut off the British from seizing Yorktown.

The blockade was successful, forcing Lord Cornwallis to surrender and allowing the Patriots to win in October of 1781.

The Battle of Yorktown was the decisive battle that led to the end of the Revolutionary War.

Emancipation

At the end of the Revolutionary War, James did not immediately win his freedom.

Virginia passed a manumission, or abolition, act in 1782 that allowed freedom to enslaved individuals who had served as soldiers in the war - soldiers but not spies.

However, William Armistead, James's master, became a member of the House of Delegates and plead the case to the Virginia Assembly to grant James's freedom.

Testimonials to James's service were given by Marquis de Lafayette himself.

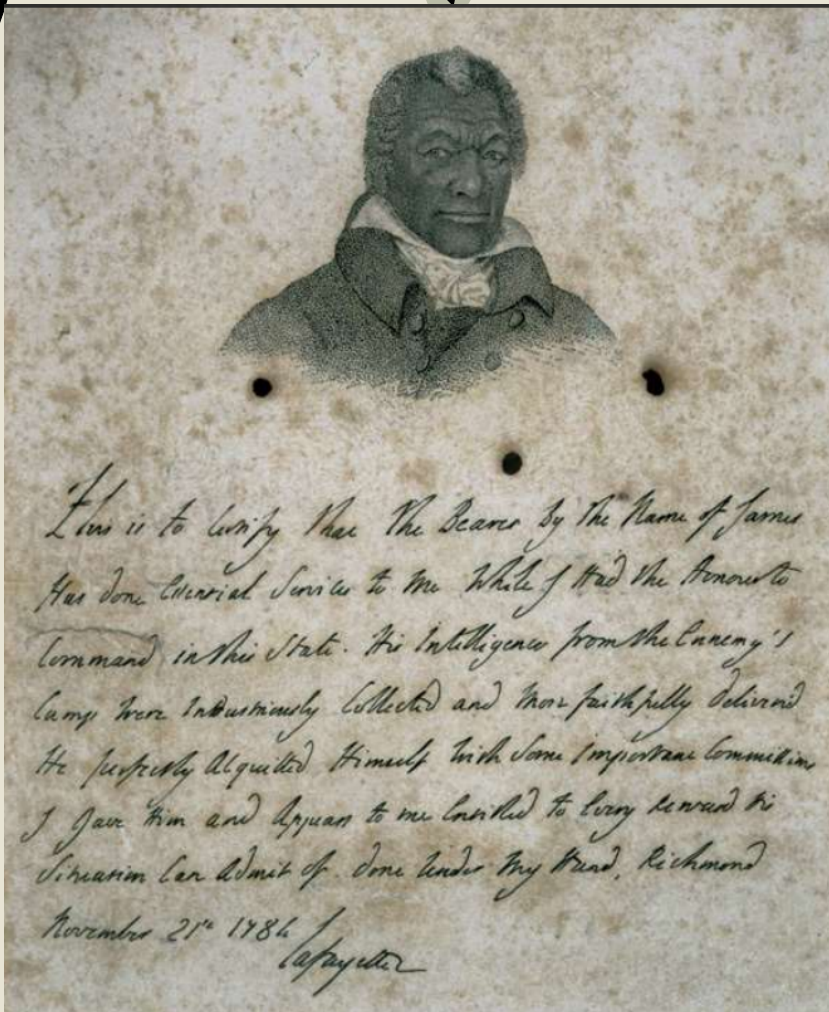
James was granted his freedom from enslavement in January 1787, and as an honor to the General who had supported his freedom added "Lafayette" to his name.

DID YOU KNOW...

Lafayette returned to France after the war concluded, but visited the new United States later in 1824 at the invitation of the nation's 3rd President, James Monroe.

Lafayette not only helped to push for James's freedom, but also saw him as a friend.

While visiting Richmond, Virginia, Lafayette stopped when he saw James and embraced him.



Primary Source Document:
Marquis de Lafayette's certificate of
commendation of James Armistead Lafayette,
1784

Transcription:

“This is to certify that the bearer by the name of James has done essential services to me while I had the honour to command in this state. His intelligences from the enemy’s camp were industriously collected and 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.

Done under my hand, Richmond,
November 21st, 1784.
Lafayette”

Courtesy of George Washington’s Mount Vernon

Later Years

Upon receiving his freedom, James Armistead Lafayette spent the rest of his days in Virginia, where he lived off his \$40 yearly pension for his services during the war.

He took ownership of his own 40-acre farm, married, and began a family.

He passed away in the 1830s.



EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

A scroll with a title and instructions. The scroll is light beige with a black outline and is set against a blue background. The text is centered on the scroll.

Vocabulary Matching

On the next panel, match the vocabulary words in the list to their definitions.

If you need help, you can find the answers at the end of the program.

Word List

Intel
Patriot
Loyalist
Ally
Pension
Undercover
Plantation
Deploy
Rebellion
Proclamation
Espionage
Blockade
Manumission

Definitions

To spread out strategically or in an extended front or line.

A public and official announcement.

Working in secret.

People who support the British governance over the colonies.

Intelligence gathered through spying.

A large farm or estate typically cultivated by enslaved, unpaid laborers or servants.

The closing off or surrounding of a place to prevent entrance or exit.

To release from slavery or servitude.

Open, organized, and armed resistance to one's government or ruler.

People who support the colonies and their freedom from British tyranny.

The act or practice of spying to discover the military and political secrets of other nations.

A person or group that is associated with another or others for some common cause or purpose.

A fixed wage.

A scroll with a light beige background and a dark blue border. The scroll is unrolled, showing text in the center. The text is in a black, serif font. The scroll has a slightly wavy, aged appearance with some darker shading at the edges.

Secret Messages

On the next panel, take a look at the word search.

But this is not just any word search! This is a word search puzzle that has a hidden message in it.

Find all of the words in the list. Once you find all of the words, you can decode the hidden message. Copy the unused letters starting in the top left corner into the blanks to reveal the secret message.

If you need help, you can find the answers at the end of the program.

R	E	T	S	A	H	E	B	R	I	T	I	S	H	A	R	P	E	E	N
C	E	D	O	P	R	M	I	N	G	I	L	N	Q	Y	T	A	G	S	O
G	I	B	A	O	Y	M	B	K	Z	H	L	O	U	W	G	T	A	D	I
P	R	A	E	K	S	Q	I	B	C	H	M	G	Y	X	E	R	N	O	S
A	Q	W	T	L	C	W	U	S	F	Z	K	N	I	F	L	I	O	U	S
C	I	S	B	Q	L	O	G	E	T	H	W	I	O	O	K	O	I	B	I
W	O	N	H	Y	M	I	L	Z	M	E	N	Q	Y	G	W	T	P	L	M
W	O	R	T	X	D	R	O	B	Z	R	A	A	H	D	R	L	S	E	U
S	R	X	N	E	O	F	B	N	E	X	L	D	T	U	W	F	E	A	N
V	A	Q	U	W	L	P	M	V	F	I	T	T	J	Y	S	E	M	G	A
R	H	L	R	S	A	K	O	V	S	C	E	Q	P	N	U	O	V	E	M
C	K	S	C	O	J	L	K	T	I	E	N	S	L	A	V	E	D	N	K
D	X	F	I	D	U	G	L	D	E	T	T	E	Y	A	F	A	L	T	D
N	Z	Y	J	T	L	M	E	I	W	S	T	N	D	Q	E	M	O	P	C
K	Z	F	I	M	I	N	T	Z	S	V	U	R	O	V	Q	F	I	H	O
P	G	O	I	I	E	R	T	C	A	J	E	D	G	X	J	G	R	Z	S
P	N	Z	O	B	R	M	B	R	A	H	V	K	R	V	U	M	J	E	M
C	N	X	I	M	Q	N	L	G	C	G	A	J	N	H	K	A	M	K	Q
O	Q	F	X	N	M	U	G	D	K	E	K	K	C	M	C	A	L	C	D
T	U	U	P	W	G	H	O	I	K	K	A	N	M	E	D	V	I	M	Y

Word List:

- Armistead
- Benedict
- Blockade
- British
- Cornwallis
- Double Agent
- Enslaved
- Espionage
- Intel
- Lafayette
- Loyalist
- Manumission
- Patriot
- Rebellion
- Revolution
- Spy

Secret Message:

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Check Out These Additional Resources

- **Makematic: James Lafayette - Revolutionary Spy**
International Spy Museum
[Link here](#)
- **James Armistead Lafayette - African American Trailblazers**
Library of VA
[Link here](#)
- **Lafayette's Testimonial to James Armistead Lafayette**
George Washington's Mount Vernon
[Link here](#)
- **James Armistead Lafayette: A Fight for Freedom and Equality**
Virginia Museum of History and Culture
[Link here](#)

A cartoon-style illustration of a scroll with a light beige background and a dark blue border. The scroll is unrolled, showing a central area with the text "ACTIVITY ANSWER KEYS" written in a bold, black, serif font. The scroll has a slightly wavy, aged appearance with some small tears and shadows along its edges. The background is a solid blue color.

ACTIVITY ANSWER KEYS

Vocabulary Matching

Definitions

Word List

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Intel | To spread out strategically or in an extended front or line. |
| Patriot | A public and official announcement. |
| Loyalist | Working in secret. |
| Ally | People who support the British governance over the colonies. |
| Pension | Intelligence gathered through spying. |
| Undercover | A large farm or estate typically cultivated by enslaved, unpaid laborers or servants. |
| Plantation | The closing off or surrounding of a place to prevent entrance or exit. |
| Deploy | To release from slavery or servitude. |
| Rebellion | Open, organized, and armed resistance to one's government or ruler. |
| Proclamation | People who support the colonies and their freedom from British tyranny. |
| Espionage | The act or practice of spying to discover the military and political secrets of other nations. |
| Blockade | A person or group that is associated with another or others for some common cause or purpose. |
| Manumission | A fixed wage. |

Secret Messages

R	E	T	S	A	H	E	B	R	I	T	I	S	H	A	R	P	E	E	N
C	E	D	O	P	R	M	I	N	G	I	L	N	Q	Y	T	A	G	S	O
G	I	B	A	O	Y	M	B	K	Z	H	L	O	U	W	G	T	A	D	I
P	R	A	E	K	S	Q	I	B	C	H	M	G	Y	X	E	R	N	O	S
A	Q	W	T	L	C	W	U	S	F	Z	K	N	I	F	L	I	O	U	S
C	I	S	B	Q	L	O	G	E	T	H	W	I	O	O	K	O	I	B	I
W	O	N	H	Y	M	I	L	Z	M	E	N	Q	Y	G	W	T	P	L	M
W	O	R	T	X	D	R	O	B	Z	R	A	A	H	D	R	L	S	E	U
S	R	X	N	E	O	F	B	N	E	X	L	D	T	U	W	F	E	A	N
V	A	Q	U	W	L	P	M	V	F	I	T	T	J	Y	S	E	M	G	A
R	H	L	R	S	A	K	O	V	S	C	E	Q	P	N	U	O	V	E	M
C	K	S	C	O	J	L	K	T	I	E	N	S	L	A	V	E	D	N	K
D	X	F	I	D	U	G	L	D	E	T	T	E	Y	A	F	A	L	T	D
N	Z	Y	J	T	L	M	E	I	W	S	T	N	D	Q	E	M	O	P	C
K	Z	F	I	M	I	N	T	Z	S	V	U	R	O	V	Q	F	I	H	O
P	G	O	I	I	E	R	T	C	A	J	E	D	G	X	J	G	R	Z	S
P	N	Z	O	B	R	M	B	R	A	H	V	K	R	V	U	M	J	E	M
C	N	X	I	M	Q	N	L	G	C	G	A	J	N	H	K	A	M	K	Q
O	Q	F	X	N	M	U	G	D	K	E	K	K	C	M	C	A	L	C	D
T	U	U	P	W	G	H	O	I	K	K	A	N	M	E	D	V	I	M	Y

Secret Message:

The British
are
coming!