

**An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery**

March 29, 1799, State of New-York, Passed at the Twenty-Second Meeting of the Legislature Begun the Second Day of January, 1799 (Albany, 1799).

*Be it enacted* ... That any child born of a slave within this state after the fourth day of July next shall be deemed and adjudged to be born free: Provided nevertheless. That such child shall be the servant of the legal proprietor of his or her mother until such servant, if a male, shall arrive at the age of twenty-eight years, and if a female, at the age of twenty-five years.

*And be it further enacted* ... That such proprietor, his, her or their heirs or assigns, shall be entitled to the service of such child until he or she shall arrive to the age aforesaid, in the same manner as if such child had been bound to service by the overseers of the poor.

*And be it further enacted* ... That the person entitled to such service may, nevertheless, within one year after the birth of such child, elect to abandon his or her right to such service, by a notification of the same from under his or her hand, and lodged with the clerk of the town or city where the owner of the mother of any such child may reside; in which case every child abandoned as aforesaid shall be considered as paupers of the respective town or city where the proprietor or owner of the mother of such child may reside at the time of its birth; and liable to be bound out by the overseers of the poor on the same terms and conditions that the children of paupers were subject to before the passing of this act.

Source: Gellman and Quigley, eds. *Jim Crow New York, A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship 1777-1877*. New York: New York University Press, 2003, 52-55.

**Note:** the New York State Archives have a zoomable version of the original document online at <http://iarchives.nysed.gov/dmsBlue/viewImageData.jsp?id=177879>

**Activity Instructions**

*To be completed as a group*

1. Without reading through it, examine the document. Discuss the following:

- How old do you think the document is?
- What physical characteristics do you notice?

2. Read out loud and **transcribe** (see glossary below) the document, taking note of any words you cannot decipher.

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3. Discuss the following:

- This document is a slave bill of sale or slave indenture (see glossary). What kind of transaction does it chronicle?

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- Find the names of approximately 5 people mentioned in the slave indenture and determine their role in the transaction. What is their relationship to each other, and what is required of each person in the transaction?

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4. Share what you learned about the slave indentures with your partner groups, reporting the content of the document, the individuals mentioned in it, and the dates. Reflect on how the documents compare to one another and draw conclusions about what they tell us.

- Plot with your partner group the following on the below timeline: a) when the first indenture was written b) when the second indenture was written c) when the law was enacted d) when the people in the indentures will be freed?

1700

1800

1900

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5. A student from each group will share the members' findings before the group at large and propose a question arising from the activity. This question will serve as a prompt for class discussion and further work group work when we next meet in our individual classrooms. This archival activity and attendant discussion will serve as the basis for blog 2.

Part II of BHS activity will engage the slave bills of sale and the runaway slave ads to stimulate a discussion of bondage and resistance. Who were the first abolitionists? Was the 1799 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery produced by white men alone?

**Glossary**

To *transcribe* is to make a full written or typewritten copy of something. In this case, you might transcribe this document in order to have an easy-to-read record of its contents.

An *indenture* is a contract binding one party into the service of another for a specified term.

*Manumission* or *emancipation* is the act of setting free or being set free from slavery.

## Archival Materials Used

### **Citations for September 24, 2012**

#### **Group 1A: pre-1799**

Slave indenture for Jin, 1777; Hubbard family papers, 1974.044, box 1, folder 11; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Slave indenture for Jin, 1782; Stoothoff family collection, ARC.150, box 1, folder 17; Brooklyn Historical Society.

#### **Group 1B: post-1799**

Slave indenture for Jane and children Susan and Jane, 1814; [?]; Brooklyn Historical Society. **NOTE: I don't have the file for this document but am looking for it.**

#### **Group 2A: pre-1799**

Slave indenture for Dinah, 1794; Lefferts family papers, ARC.145, box 3, folder 9; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Slave indenture for Dinah, 1795; John Middagh papers, 1974.027, box 1, series 3, folder 1.1; Brooklyn Historical Society.

#### **Group 2B: post-1799**

Slave indenture for Mercy, 1814; Lefferts family papers, ARC.145, box 3, folder 9; Brooklyn Historical Society.

#### **Group 3A: pre-1799**

Slave indenture for Frank, 1719; [?]; Brooklyn Historical Society. **NOTE: I don't have the file for this document but am looking for it.**

Slave indenture for Frank, 1739; [?]; Brooklyn Historical Society **NOTE: I don't have the file for this document but am looking for it.**

#### **Group 3B: post-1799**

Slave indenture for Grace, 1816; Lefferts family papers, ARC.145, box 3, folder misc. Business, Slave Bills, 1787-1852; Brooklyn Historical Society.