



## DOCUMENTING THE LIVES OF PEOPLE WHO WERE ENSLAVED:

# TEACHING NYC'S HISTORY OF SLAVERY THROUGH PRIMARY SOURCES

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## ABOUT US

The mission of the NYC Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS) is to foster civic life by preserving and providing public access to historical and contemporary records and information about New York City government. The agency ensures that City records are properly maintained following professional archival and record management practices. Materials are available to diverse communities, both online and in person. For more information about how DORIS can work with your school, please contact us via email: [education@records.nyc.gov](mailto:education@records.nyc.gov) or visit our [website](#). Follow us on social media!



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**Contributor:** Emily Mandelstam

## OVERVIEW

### MYTH vs. REALITY

When most people think of slavery in the United States, their minds immediately turn to the American South—a region often associated with plantations, oppression, and the brutal exploitation of enslaved people. The North, by contrast, is commonly imagined as a bastion of freedom, equality, and abolitionist ideals.

But this perception is far from the full story. Slavery was not confined to the South. In fact, it was a legal and entrenched institution in many northern states, including:

Connecticut

Maine

Massachusetts

New Hampshire

New Jersey

Pennsylvania

Rhode Island

Vermont

And right here in New York.

For nearly 200 years, slavery shaped the economy, society, and politics of New York and its neighbors. The widely held notion of a "free North" during this period is a myth.

So what was the reality? This curriculum aid invites you to uncover and grapple with the complex history of slavery in New York City and beyond, using primary sources from the collections of the Municipal Archives and Library. Together, we will explore the uncomfortable truths and hidden stories that reveal a more complete picture of our shared past.



## QUESTIONS—OVERVIEW

1. Before reading this, were you aware that slavery was legal in New York? If so, where or when did you learn about it? If not, why do you think this part of New York's history is often overlooked?
2. How does learning about slavery in New York change your understanding of the state's history?

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

Greetings, Teachers!

This curriculum aid explores the history of slavery in New York City. It was developed to teach 11th graders about a little-known aspect of our city's past: the existence of the brutal institution that denied freedom and equality to many Black New Yorkers – for 200 years.

The winds of change are currently sweeping through the education world, altering the ways that many subjects are taught. Greater attention is being paid to narratives about oppression and injustice. This curriculum aid about slavery in NYC is part of that educational reckoning.

### Primary Sources

The beating heart of this curriculum aid is its primary sources. Primary sources are archival materials that offer contemporaneous — and often first-hand — accounts of historical eras and events. These are materials that were created at or near the time when the events being studied actually occurred, by people who had a direct connection to these events. Primary sources are key to understanding history. They provide context, look, feel, and language that transport the researcher back to the era being examined.

Primary sources come in many forms, including official proclamations, laws, administrative records (like birth certificates and census reports), trial transcripts, newspaper articles, photographs, personal letters, diaries, autobiographies, and so on.

Primary sources do not provide scholarly analysis or interpretation – that's the job of secondary sources.

You can ask your students why it's important to use primary sources to study history.

Responses might include:

- provide an authentic link to the past;
- reveal the complexities, contradictions, and contributions of the past;
- help us construct nuanced interpretations of history;
- help us understand many of the experiences and viewpoints of the people who were directly involved in a moment in history;
- let us hear their voices, unmediated; and
- help us grasp the social, cultural, economic, and political context of a particular time and place.

When using each primary source included in this curriculum aid, you can ask your students some or all of the following questions:

- What type of primary source is this?
- What do you notice about this primary source?
- What do you know or can you guess about this primary source or where it comes from that helps you understand it?
- Whose perspective regarding the event or period being studied is reflected in this primary source?
- What else was happening at the time when this primary source was created? How does that help you understand why it was created?
- Do you think that this primary source is important – why or why not?
- What does this primary source teach you that you didn't know before?

The goal of these primary sources is to inspire students to explore and learn independently, while also opening their eyes to important historical issues.

## STANDARDS

**7th Grade:** The changing status of Africans and African Americans under the Dutch and British  
– Enslaved Africans and the development of the Americas

Students will analyze slavery as a deeply established component of the colonial economic system and social structure.

**11th Grade 11.1 b:** A number of factors influenced colonial economic development, social structures, and labor systems, causing variation by region.

Students will examine the factors influencing variations in colonial social structures and labor systems.

## KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

These key words are listed in the order in which they appear in this curriculum aid:

- slip
- collateral
- manumission/manumit
- abolition/abolitionist
- insurrection
- emancipation
- freeholder
- aliens
- commemorate/  
commemorating
- reparations/reparative
- apartheid
- sterilized
- eugenics

## INTERNAL LINKS

<https://www.archives.nyc/slavery-records>

<https://www.archives.nyc/slavery-manumission>

[https://nycrecords.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO\\_45f3338b-fb8f-4326-8384-27fb8bcc5d4b/](https://nycrecords.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_45f3338b-fb8f-4326-8384-27fb8bcc5d4b/)

[https://nycrecords.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO\\_33ff4238-1442-461c-a412-aca367330c83/](https://nycrecords.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_33ff4238-1442-461c-a412-aca367330c83/)

## SLAVERY ARRIVED IN NEW YORK – AND STAYED

Slavery landed on our shores in 1626, when the Dutch West India Company brought 11 African men, forcibly taken from their homeland to the colony of New Amsterdam (later New York City). As the colony grew, driven by the fur trade and agriculture, the practice of enslaving people expanded alongside it. Africans were kidnapped from their homes, shackled, and transported across the Atlantic in horrific conditions. Upon arrival, they were sold into lifelong bondage, their humanity stripped away by an economic system that profited from their labor.

These enslaved individuals were forced to perform grueling work that shaped the colony's infrastructure and economy. They cleared land, constructed buildings, docks, and roads, and maintained households. For example, present-day Broadway, originally a trail used by the Lenape people, was widened using the labor of enslaved Africans. By the mid-1630s, historians estimate that about one-third of New Amsterdam's population was composed of enslaved individuals.

When the British seized control in 1664 and renamed the colony New York, slavery persisted and intensified. By the early 1730s, enslaved people made up roughly 30% of New York's population, with nearly 40% of white households in the city enslaving at least one person. These numbers exceeded those in other northern cities such as Philadelphia and Boston, making New York City second only to Charleston, South Carolina, in the percentage of slaveholding households among colonial cities.

The lives of enslaved people in New York were governed by strict and oppressive laws. Enslaved individuals were compelled to perform tasks assigned by their owners or by others who "rented" their labor. They worked in homes, businesses, and trades such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, blacksmithing, and barrel-making. Unlike the enslaved laborers on southern plantations, many in New York performed urban labor. However, their existence was

equally constrained, marked by discrimination, violence, and the constant threat of brutal punishments.

Enslaved people were forbidden from owning land, carrying weapons, leaving their enslavers' homes without permission, or gathering in groups larger than three unless directed by their enslavers. They could not ride horses in a "disorderly" manner, visit bars on Sundays, or use burial cloths known as palls, an important Christian symbol, at funerals. Those who violated these laws faced severe punishments, such as public whippings or imprisonment.

Additionally, families were often torn apart, as enslaved individuals were frequently housed alone in attics, cellars, or other small spaces.

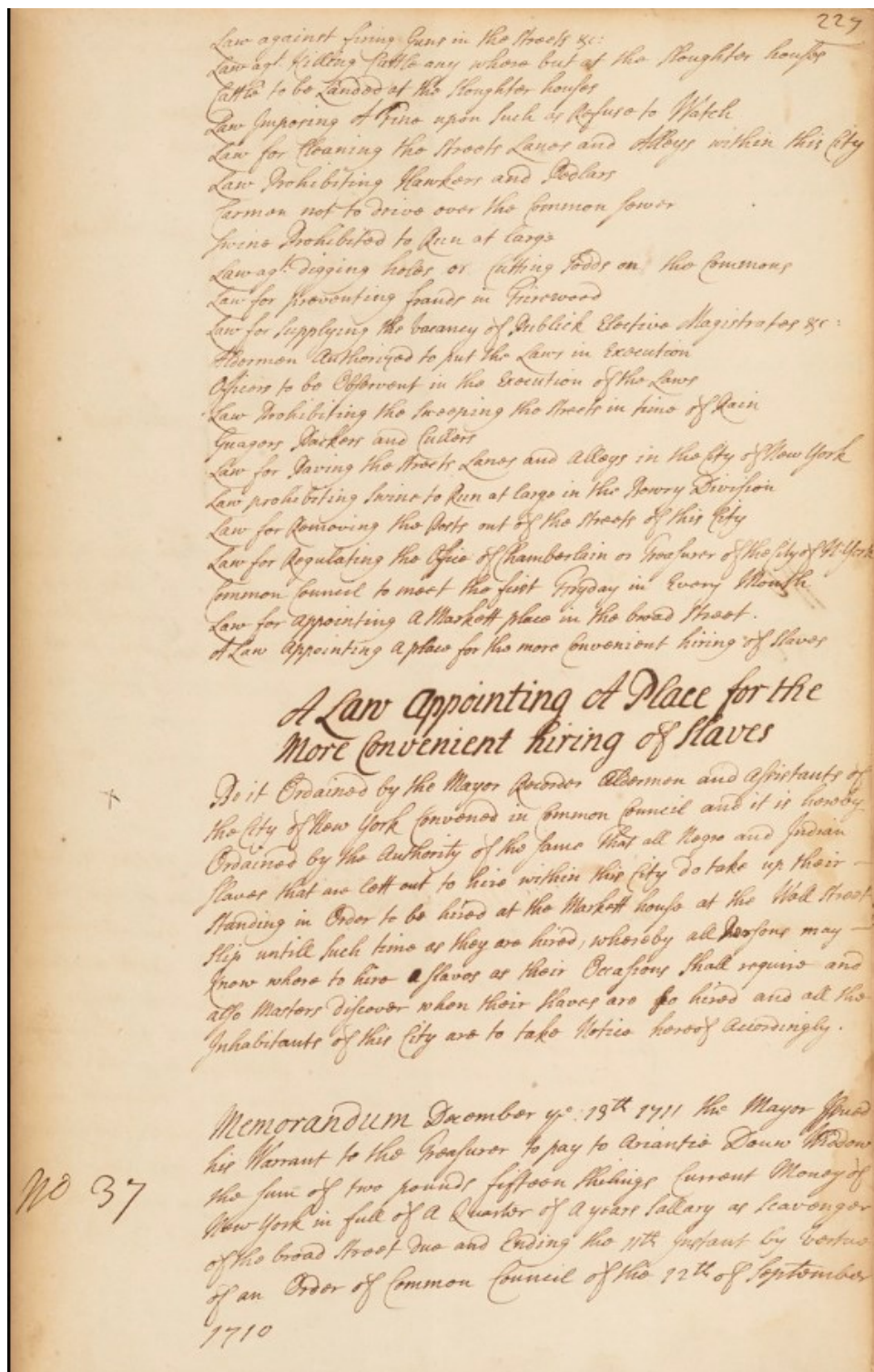
Even after the Revolutionary War and the Declaration of Independence's proclamation that "all men are created equal," slavery remained legal in New York. It was not until 1827—over half a century later—that the state formally abolished slavery, granting freedom to its enslaved population.



## QUESTIONS—SLAVERY ARRIVED IN NY

1. What physical and emotional challenges might an enslaved person have faced after being kidnapped, forcibly taken aboard a ship, and transported across the ocean? How might different individuals have responded to this experience?
2. How might an enslaved person have felt upon arriving in an unfamiliar land, separated from their family, and surrounded by new languages, customs, and laws? How did enslaved communities find ways to resist, adapt, and preserve their cultures?
3. What factors made slavery an integral part of New York City's development, and how did different groups benefit from or resist its expansion?
4. What arguments—whether economic, religious, or racial—were used to defend slavery, and how did abolitionists and enslaved people challenge these justifications?
5. How did Dutch, British, and early American leaders shape the institution of slavery, and what tensions existed between their support for slavery and their claims about liberty and human rights?
6. The Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal,” yet many of its authors enslaved people. In what ways did enslavers and politicians reconcile the ideals of freedom with the reality of slavery, and how did enslaved people and their allies expose these contradictions?
7. If you could share a message with someone who resisted slavery—whether through escape, rebellion, legal action, or preserving cultural traditions—what would you say? How would you honor their struggles and contributions?

## PRIMARY SOURCE 1



A Law Appointing a Place for the More Convenient hiring of Slaves, November 30, 1711;  
 This law designed Wall Street near the pier as the place for the hiring of enslaved people.

Below is a transcription of an excerpt from Primary Source 1, with original spellings, punctuation, and capitalizations:

*A Law Appointing A Place for the More Convenient Hiring of Slaves*

*Be it Ordained by the Mayor Recorder Aldermen and Assistants of the City of New York Convened in Common Council and it is hereby Ordained by the Authority of the same That all Negro and Indian slaves that are lett out to hire within this City do take up their Standing in Order to be hired at the Markett house at the Wall Street Slip untill Such time as they are hired, whereby all Persons may Know where to hire slaves as their Occasions Shall require and also Masters discover when their Slaves are so hired and all the Inhabitants of this City are to take Notice hereof Accordingly.*

## QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 1

1. What is the main purpose of “A Law Appointing a Place for the More Convenient Hiring of Slaves”?
2. How do you interpret the establishment of a government-sanctioned market for enslaved people in the heart of British New York?
3. What does this law reveal about New York in the early 18th century, particularly regarding race, power, and economic priorities in the British colony?
4. Many banks and insurance companies that still operate today, on or near Wall Street, played a role in the transatlantic slave trade. These institutions insured the owners of human trafficking vessels against financial losses if enslaved Africans died during the ocean crossing, accepted enslaved people as collateral for loans, and even seized enslaved individuals from enslavers who defaulted on debts. How did these financial practices shape the economic and social landscape of early America, and what long-term effects might they have had?



# PRIMARY SOURCE 2

*Bill of Sale for Slave.* [G. & R. Waite, Printers, No. 64 & 38, Maiden-Lane.]

**Know all Men by these Presents,**  
 That *Jamima Stout* of the *City of New York* for and in consideration of the sum of *One Hundred Seventy five* dollars, current money aforesaid, have granted, bargained and sold, and by these presents, do grant, bargain and sell unto *Josiah C Hook* of *New York* a certain *Negro Boy* aged *Sixteen* years, or thereabouts, and known by the name of *Abraham* To have and to hold the said *Abraham* by these presents granted, bargained and sold unto the said *Josiah C Hook* his Executors, Administrators and Assigns, for and during the space of *Sixteen* Years freely, quietly, peaceably, and entirely without any contradiction, claim, disturbance or hindrance of any persons whatsoever, so that neither *I* the said *Jamima Stout* nor any other for *me* or in *my* name, any Right, Title, Interest or Demand, of, in, to, or for the said *Abraham* ought to exact, challenge, claim, or demand at any time or times hereafter, for and during the time so granted, bargained and sold of the said *Abraham* by these presents, but from all Action, Right, Title, Claim, Demand, Possession and Interest thereof, shall be wholly barred and excluded by force and virtue of these presents. And *I* the said *Jamima Stout* for *myself* — Executors and Administrators, the said *Negro Boy* unto the said *Josiah C Hook* his Executors, Administrators and Assigns, against the said *Jamima Stout* her Executors, Administrators and Assigns, and against all and every other person or persons whatsoever, shall and will warrant and defend by these presents, the Sale of the said *Negro Boy* unto *him* the said *Josiah C Hook*

In witness whereof, the parties to these presents have hereunto set their hands and seals, on the *Twelfth* day of *May* in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and *eighty nine*

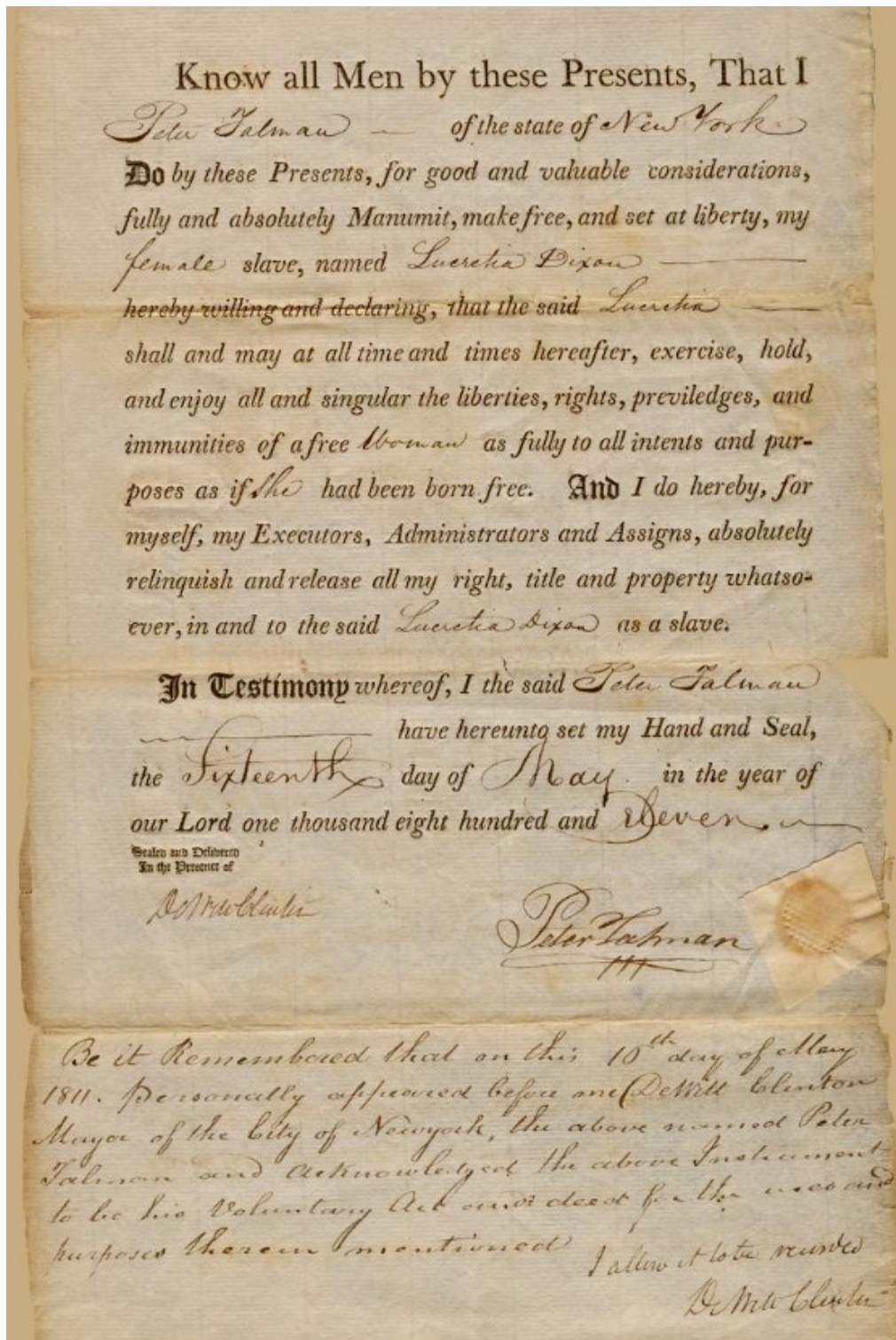
Sealed and delivered }  
 in the presence of }  
*A. Butler*  
 the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May, 1809.  
*Jamima Stout*

Bill of Sale for 16-Year-Old Enslaved Boy Named Abraham (Dated May 12, 1809)

## QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 2

1. How do you think Abraham might have felt being treated as property—an inanimate object—rather than as a human being?
2. What is the tone and language of this legal document? Does its matter-of-fact quality surprise you? Why or why not? Are there any specific words or phrases that stand out to you? If so, what are they, and why do they catch your attention?
3. What do the printed words at the top of the document (“Bill of Sale for Slave”), along with the printer’s name and address, suggest about the normalization of slavery in this society?
4. What were the broader implications of selling human beings, including cultural, social, political, ethical, and religious consequences?





Manumission Document Freeing Lecretia Dixon from Enslavement (Dated May 16, 1811;  
 witnessed and signed by New York City Mayor DeWitt Clinton on May 10, 1811).

Although slavery was legal in New York, it faced significant opposition. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the city's free Black population grew, and many of these individuals became key leaders in the anti-slavery movement. New York's free Black residents came from diverse backgrounds: some were descendants of enslaved people who were granted freedom by Dutch enslavers in exchange for military service against local Indigenous tribes; others arrived as free people from Europe, South America, and other regions, remaining free in New York; and many escaped slavery in the South, traveling to freedom via the Underground Railroad and gaining protection under New York law. One of the most prominent figures was Frederick Douglass, a formerly enslaved person who fled to New York and became a leading abolitionist voice.

White allies also joined the anti-slavery movement, advocating for the end of slavery. Enslaved Black people themselves resisted slavery in powerful and courageous ways, including organizing rebellions against their enslavers. These acts of defiance came at great personal risk, as many rebels faced brutal punishments, including execution, when uprisings were suppressed.

While it was legal to own enslaved people in New York, it was also legal for enslavers to free them through a process known as "manumission." Many New York enslavers voluntarily emancipated those they had enslaved, contributing to the growth of the free Black population in the city.

## QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 3

1. How do you interpret this enslaver's decision to free Lucretia Dixon?
2. What might have motivated enslavers to free the people they enslaved? Consider moral, religious, personal, financial, or other factors. Does the language in this manumission document provide any clues?
3. What were some reasons enslavers might have chosen to keep individuals in bondage rather than grant them freedom?
4. How did individual acts of manumission affect the broader institution of slavery? Did they challenge or reinforce the system in any way?
5. What emotions or thoughts do you imagine Lucretia Dixon might have experienced upon gaining her freedom?

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294 I Peter Stryker do swear and declare in the presence of Almighty God that my Negro Woman named Lavina Spader has a male child named Michael Pappan which was born on 21<sup>st</sup> Nov<sup>r</sup> 1819 to the best of my knowledge —

Peter Stryker

Sworn and subscribed  
before me this 7<sup>th</sup> Dec<sup>r</sup> 1819

Ad<sup>m</sup> Hegeman

Received and recorded by me the  
7<sup>th</sup> Dec<sup>r</sup> 1819

Ad<sup>m</sup> Hegeman Town clk.

I John Blake do swear in the presence of Almighty God that my negro woman named has a female child named Ann Born on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1820 to the best of my knowledge

John Blake

Sworn and subscribed  
before me this 19<sup>th</sup> April 1820

Ad<sup>m</sup> Hegeman J. P.

Rec<sup>d</sup> and Recorded by me the  
19<sup>th</sup> April 1820 —

Ad<sup>m</sup> Hegeman T. clerk

I John Vanderweir do solemnly and sincerely swear and declare that my black woman named Mary had a male child named Josh born on 28<sup>th</sup> Dec<sup>r</sup> 1820 according to the best of my knowledge —

John Vanderweir

Sworn and subscribed  
before me this 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1821

Ad<sup>m</sup> Hegeman J. P.

Received and recorded by  
me the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1821

Ad<sup>m</sup> Hegeman Town clerk

*Birth Records of Enslaved People in Town of Flatbush in Brooklyn,  
dated 1819, 1820, and 1821.*



An important milestone in the gradual dismantling of slavery in New York was the formation of the Manumission Society in 1785. Officially named the New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves and Protecting Such of Them as Have Been or May Be Liberated, this group included influential white men such as Alexander Hamilton and John Jay. Many members of the Society were enslavers. Their views were often contradictory: while they believed slavery was morally wrong and should eventually end, they were unwilling to support immediate abolition. As one historian observed, “The members of the Manumission Society had come to acknowledge that slavery was wrong, but they couldn’t imagine abrupt change. Slavery was the source of so much of their wealth and power—and it had been for generations. Rather than free everyone all at once, they wanted to mitigate the disruptions to their own comfort. There was a sharp difference between their words and their actions.”

Although most members of the Manumission Society rejected a proposal requiring them to immediately free the people they enslaved, the group actively lobbied the New York State Legislature to abolish slavery. Responding to pressure from the Society and other advocacy groups, the Legislature passed a compromise measure on March 29, 1799: the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery. Rather than mandating immediate emancipation, the law stipulated that any child born to an enslaved woman after July 4, 1799, would eventually be freed. However, there was a significant condition: these children were required to serve their mothers’ enslavers until age 25 for females and age 28 for males. Only after completing this period of enforced servitude would they gain their freedom.

To implement this gradual emancipation policy, New York officials began keeping records of births to enslaved women after July 4, 1799. These records played a crucial role in documenting the transition away from slavery.



## QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 4

1. In 1799, New York passed a law requiring that the births of children born to enslaved mothers be recorded. How do you think this rule affected these children's lives? Did it help them gain freedom, or did it create new challenges? Explain your reasoning with specific examples.
2. Before computers, birth records were written by hand and kept in different offices across New York City. Fires, floods, and other disasters sometimes destroyed these records. How do you think the loss of important documents like birth records affected people's ability to prove their identity and legal rights, especially for those seeking freedom?
3. Children born to enslaved mothers after July 4, 1799, were supposed to be freed eventually under New York's gradual emancipation law. But what if their birth record was lost or destroyed? How might this have affected their chances of gaining freedom? Who might have helped or hurt their chances—enslavers, judges, government officials, or abolitionists?

# PRIMARY SOURCE 5

## 1810 Census of New York City, Categorizing White Residents, Immigrants, Free Black People, Enslaved Individuals, and Others

As laws and attitudes changed, so did the numbers of enslaved Black people in New York City.

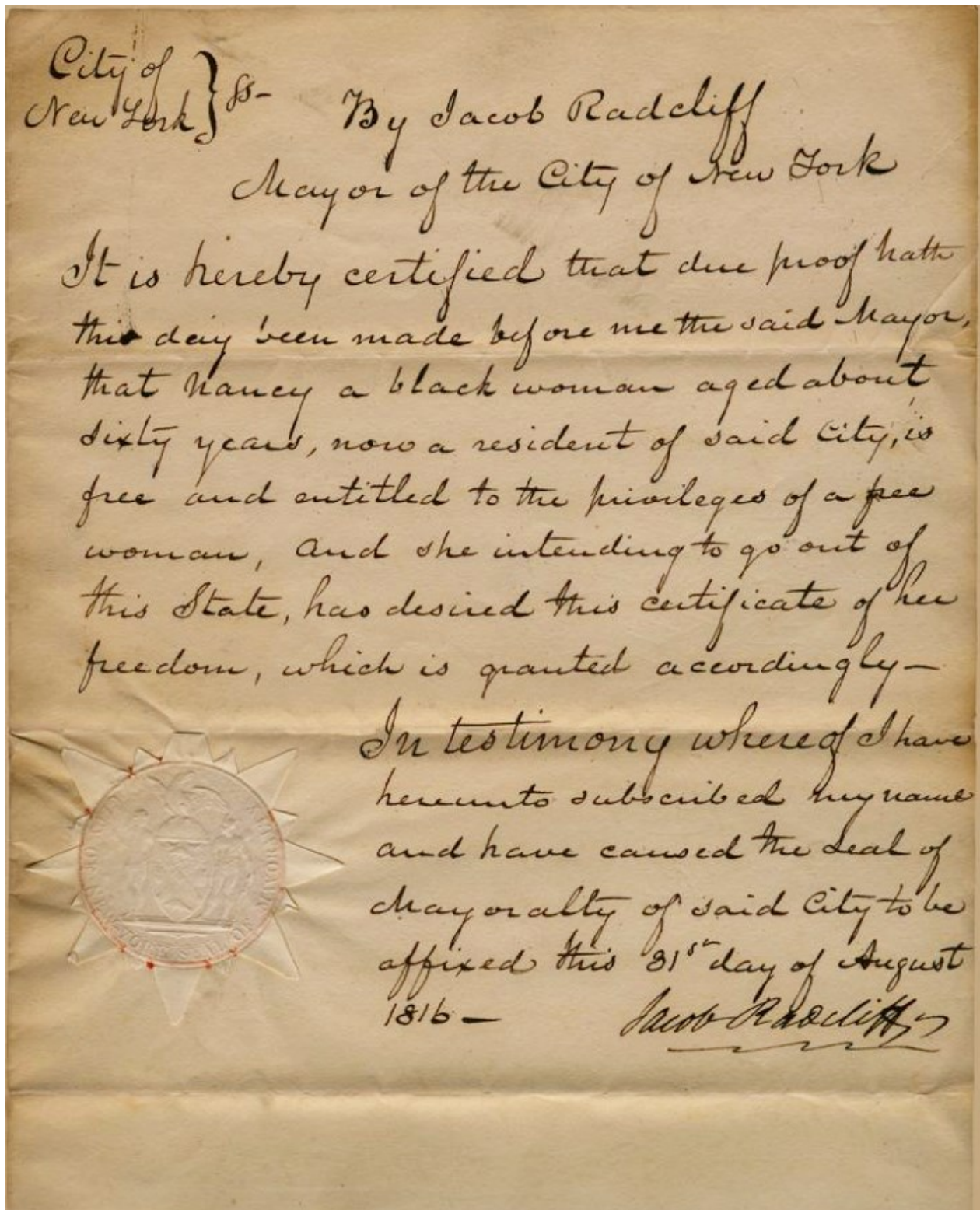
*Census of the whole Population of the City & County of New York 1810*

Wards	Holders	Personal Estate	Tenants	Furnes	White Inhabitants		Aliens		Coloured Inhabitants		Slaves		Total
					Male	Female	M	F	M	F	M	F	
First	505	1183	766	880	3461	3615	370	168	250	443	230	287	8824
Second	338	934	734	579	2943	3024	222	155	200	398	44	100	7086
Third	338	961	1328	592	3304	3311	135	79	320	471	95	176	7891
Fourth	348	1420	1453	654	4486	4634	404	8	272	427	22	72	10325
Fifth	330	1277	2294	752	6251	6732	217	2	702	1002	86	141	15113
Sixth	260	618	1844	482	4082	4634	837	902	458	585	48	51	11097
Seventh	337	1991	1662	636	4635	5193	548	518	339	378	24	52	11597
Eighth	421	326	1227	302	4324	4203	218	164	235	247	50	92	9533
Ninth	207	126	215	274	1213	1516	150	111	112	126	101	132	3461
Tenth	334	1207	442	1189	4302	4606	244	234	764	190	31	62	9833
	3038	16143	16965	6340	38981	40870	3345	2341	3052	4267	731	1165	94760

## QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 5

1. Using your math skills, calculate the number of enslaved people in New York City in 1810 as a percentage of the total population. How does this percentage compare to that of the early 1730s, when approximately 30% of the population was enslaved?
2. What factors might have contributed to changes in the size of the enslaved population between the early 1730s and 1810?
3. Calculate the total percentage of Black residents - including both free and enslaved people - during the period of the 1810 Census of New York City. How might demographic data from the 1810 Census reflect larger social and political tensions? What might the numbers suggest about power dynamics in the city?
4. This census report includes categories such as "freeholders" that may be unfamiliar. Identify any terms you do not recognize, research their meanings as they were understood in 1810, and discuss why these categories might have been significant enough to be included in the census.





Certificate of Freedom Requested by 60-Year-Old Free Black Woman Named Nancy, signed by New York City Mayor Jacob Radcliff on August 31, 1816.

In 1793, President George Washington, who enslaved people, signed the federal Fugitive Slave Act after it was passed by Congress. This law required state and federal authorities to capture and return escaped enslaved individuals anywhere in the nation. It also allowed enslavers and their hired agents to search for those who had fled, even in states where slavery was limited or abolished. Southern enslavers pushed for this law as a means of reclaiming what they considered their "property."

Although many Northern states resisted this mandate and often refused to enforce it, both enslaved and free Black people in New York and elsewhere lived under constant threat of being captured and sold into slavery by bounty hunters. The renowned memoir, *12 Years a Slave*, written by New York resident and free Black man Solomon Northup, recounts just such an ordeal.

Nancy, a free Black New Yorker, obtained a certificate from the mayor affirming her legal status as a free person. She sought this document in preparation for an upcoming trip outside New York State. Like many free Black individuals, she hoped that carrying official proof of her status would protect her from false accusations of being a fugitive and the risk of being forcibly taken into slavery in the South.

## QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 6

1. Why did Congress pass the Fugitive Slave Act? What were the political and economic pressures behind this legislation?
2. What do you think the Fugitive Slave Act meant for the daily lives of free and enslaved Black people in New York City?
3. How would you evaluate the protection that Nancy's certificate of freedom conferred on her? What would happen if she encountered unscrupulous bounty-hunters?
4. Do you see any parallels in today's world that allow innocent people to be falsely accused of having committed crimes based on their race or ethnicity? If so, give examples.





*Statue of Abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher in Front of Brooklyn Borough Hall.*



*Aerial View of Brooklyn Borough Hall Plaza with statue of Abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher visible in bottom left.*



Henry Ward Beecher, a leading Protestant minister, was an influential and nationally known white abolitionist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He used his dynamic sermons at his Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn, along with his numerous writings and lectures, to vigorously oppose slavery (and support women's suffrage). He also helped make Plymouth Church an important part of the "underground railroad," the secret network of safe-houses and travel routes that helped enslaved people who were fleeing bondage in the South: Escaped slaves were allowed to hide in the church's basement. In 1891, before a crowd of 15,000, Brooklyn Mayor Alfred Clark Chapin unveiled a statue of Reverend Henry Ward Beecher in front of Brooklyn Borough Hall.

The inscription on the statue's pedestal reads: "HENRY WARD BEECHER/1813-1887/THE GRATEFUL GIFT OF MULTITUDES OF ALL CLASSES, CREEDS, AND CONDITIONS, AT HOME AND ABROAD, TO HONOR THE GREAT APOSTLE OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN."

### QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 7 & 8

1. What criteria should be used to determine whether Reverend Henry Ward Beecher is an appropriate figure to be honored outside Brooklyn Borough Hall? How do his contributions to the abolitionist movement compare to his controversies or limitations?
2. Examine the symbolism in the Beecher statue. What messages are conveyed through its composition, including the figures on the left and right sides of the pedestal? How do these artistic choices reflect or shape public memory of abolitionism?
3. Beyond Reverend Beecher, which other New Yorkers played significant roles in opposing slavery? How did their actions contribute to the abolitionist movement, and what makes them worthy of public recognition today?

## CULMINATING ACTIVITIES

Now that students have explored some of the history of slavery in New York City, they can build on their understanding through further research, analysis, and advocacy. Below are three possible projects:

### **1 - Commemorating Sites Connected to Slavery in New York City**

Although the enslaved labor market on Wall Street closed in 1762, no official memorial marked this historic site until 2015—253 years later. On June 27, 2015, the mayor of New York City unveiled a plaque recognizing the location's role in the transatlantic slave trade.

#### **Activity:**

Create a map of New York City that highlights significant locations related to the history of slavery, including places where enslaved people lived, worked, resisted, and created cultural traditions. Identify sites in the city that played an important role during the era of slavery but remain unmarked or underrecognized. Examples might include locations of enslaved people's uprisings, sites of executions of those who resisted enslavement, meeting places for abolitionists, or burial grounds.

Write a persuasive letter to an elected official (such as your City Council member, borough president, or congressional representative) advocating for official recognition of one such site. Be sure to include historical context and explain why commemoration is important for public awareness and historical justice.

### **2 - Honoring Unsung Abolitionists**

Famous abolitionists like Frederick Douglass and Henry Ward Beecher are widely celebrated, but many lesser-known individuals also played key roles in the fight against slavery.



### Activity:

Research a lesser-known New York City abolitionist, such as Black activist **David Ruggles**, educator and journalist **Maritcha Lyons**, or Underground Railroad conductor **Sydney Howard Gay**. Write a report detailing their personal background, activism, struggles, and achievements. Discuss why their efforts were significant and how they contributed to the broader abolitionist movement. Conclude by explaining why you find this individual's story inspiring and relevant today.

### 3 - Examining Reparations for Slavery

On September 12, 2024, the New York City Council passed legislation requiring the City to investigate its historical involvement in slavery and explore possible reparative measures. According to the Council's press release, officials will work with racial justice experts to:

- Document the harms caused by slavery and its lasting effects.
- Identify violations of rights linked to slavery's legacy.
- Recommend policies or legal actions to address those injustices.
- Propose criteria for who might qualify for reparations.

Potential reparative measures under consideration include monetary compensation, public apologies, memorials, a citywide "freedom trail," and more.

### Activity:

Imagine you are an advisor to the City's reparations committee. Write a well-supported report **arguing for or against** monetary reparations for the descendants of enslaved people. Consider the following questions:

- Should monetary compensation be provided? Why or why not?
- How could descendants of enslaved individuals be identified?

- Is it justifiable to provide financial restitution for historical injustices that occurred long before the present generation?
- What examples exist of groups that have received or been denied reparations?  
(Consider cases such as Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in Germany, Black South Africans after apartheid, Japanese Americans interned during World War II, and victims of forced sterilization under U.S. eugenics programs.)
- What factors influenced why some groups received reparations while others did not?

Your report should present well-reasoned arguments, supported by historical facts, moral considerations, and financial or legal perspectives.