

Lesson 4, Worksheet 3

Expert Topic Sheet - Self-Purchase

Background

Some enslaved people used their talent, skills, and perseverance to purchase their own freedom. This process often took many years. Those who were able to purchase themselves often attempted to purchase the freedom of their family members. Many enslaved people who bought their own freedom had the skills to earn money working jobs beyond their everyday duties. Some enslaved people enlisted the help of sympathetic whites or free blacks who would take their money, purchase them from their slave owner, and then set them free.

Example

In 1814, an enslaved man named Titus asked the New-York Manumission Society to help him with the emancipation of his family, which included his wife Betsey, a teenage son, a five-year-old daughter, and a baby girl. The bill of sale shows that their new owner was Reverend James Thompson, an African-American Brooklynite, who lived in Queens. Thompson freed the family once they were purchased.

Discussion questions

- What are the pros of self-purchase?
- What are the cons of self-purchase?