

KEY POINTS OF THE GRADUAL EMANCIPATION ACTS OF NEW YORK STATE

The 1799 Gradual Emancipation Bill

- Any child born to a slave woman after July 4, 1799 was deemed free, BUT that child would have to serve their mother's master until the age of 28, if a male, and 25 if a female.
- The master of such a child could choose to abandon the child within one year of his or her birth by notifying the clerk of the city or town they resided in. Failure to register the birth of the child by age one would cost the owners three to seven years of service from the servant. The servant would be then bound out by the overseer of the poor until reaching age 21.

- Abandoned children would then be considered paupers and be liable to be bound out by the overseer of the poor of the respective town.
- These children would be supported and maintained by the state of New York, not to exceed \$3.50 a month.

This provision was essentially a compensated abolition scheme that allowed slaveholders to abandon children, and then receive them back into their own homes as borders (servants) in exchange for which they would receive monthly payments from the overseers of the poor. Masters received both monthly payments and the daily services of children. (Kruger, 1985, pp.819-822)

March 26, 1802 Law

- The amount and duration of monthly compensation of abandoned children was reduced to \$2.00 a month and only paid until the child reached the age of four. Only the care of infirm children would be compensated by the state beyond age four. (Governor Clinton of New York had voiced great concern of the financial burden this program had brought and it was therefore modified.)

March 31, 1804

- The abandonment compensation program was completely ended.
- Slave owners were required to teach their children to read well enough to read the Holy Scriptures before age 21. Failure to do so would cost the owners four to seven years of service from the servant.

March 31, 1817

- Children of slaves born between 1799 and March 31, 1804, would continue to be provided for at the expense of the State according to the existing laws.
- Masters had to teach their servants who owned service to read by age 18 or give them four quarters of schooling (Kruger, 1985, p.823)
- All children of either sex born to slave mothers after March 31, 1817 and July 4, 1827 were to be freed after the age of 21. All slaves born before July 4, 1799 would be freed on July 4, 1827.

(*Therefore, a child born to a slave mother on July 3, 1827, could be kept as an indentured servant until July 3, 1848.)