

Teaching Slavery & Freedom Through Primary Sources

Introduction

For at least 129 years, slavery was part of the fabric of everyday life in Northampton. We know of 50 enslaved individuals who lived here from the town's founding in 1654 to 1783, when slavery was abolished in Massachusetts.

Suggested Grade Levels: Middle school through high school

*some documents mention of extreme physical violence or sexual activity, denoted with an asterisk

Brief description: These primary sources prompt learners to analyze the conditions of enslavement and freedom for Black individuals in Northampton, 1654-1783. Learners will explore the quality of life for enslaved people, their legal status, and their individual rights. Discussion questions prompt learners to think about how enslaved and free Black people in early Northampton expressed their agency as they were denied freedoms. This introduction also includes context about slavery in Massachusetts taken from Historic Northampton's exhibit, "Slavery & Freedom in Northampton, 1654-1783". Also included are an FAQ and key vocab list.

Each primary source is accompanied by:

- Name of the archives that holds the document
- A brief description of context
- A photo scan of the document
- A transcription of the document with contextual information annotated in yellow arrows
- Suggested questions to practice evidence based learning and historical interpretation skills

Primary Sources:

Bathsheba Hull Surety Bond, c.1748/9

Boston's Bill of Sale, c. 1715

Hannah & Mingo in the Judd Manuscript*, c. 1692

Mercy Bartlett's Will, c. 1756

Samuel Parson's Agreement With Sue & Mingo, c. 1698

Venus's Bill of Sale, c. 1731

These materials were initially collected and assembled by Historic Northampton as part of their Slavery Research Project led by Emma Winter Zeig with the assistance of Dylan Gaffney of Forbes Library and Mark Ames of Hampshire County Probate Court. This teaching guide was assembled to accompany the subsequent exhibit, "Slavery & Freedom in Northampton, 1654-1783".

For more questions, resources, or to book a tour of Historic Northampton's exhibit "Slavery & Freedom in Northampton, 1654-1783" (Open through December 2026) email Elizabeth Sacktor, Museum Educator and Program Coordinator, at esacktor@historicnorthampton.org.

Historical Context

Enslavers exerted complete power and control over the lives of enslaved people who, according to Massachusetts law, were property that could be sold or given away at any time.

Enslaved people were not “family” members. Typically, one or two enslaved people worked and lived in a single white family’s home. Being enclosed in a household with their enslavers meant they were under constant surveillance and isolated from other enslaved people. New England slavery differed from slavery in the South, where large numbers of people, many living in separate housing, labored together on one plantation. Under both systems, enslaved people were classified as property.

Terms

Servant

The term “servant” was a common indicator of enslaved status in Northampton official records. In the 1700s, many enslaved people were listed by their first name, followed by “servant,” and then the first and last name of the white resident, who was their enslaver. For example, when Dorothy was baptized in 1738, she was listed as “Dorothy, servt. to Benj. Stebbins.”

First and Last Names

In town, church, and probate records, enslaved and free Black people were referred to by their first name alone or with “Negro” in place of a last name. For example, Amos Hull Sr. was often described as “Amos Negro.” Despite what was recorded, many enslaved people had both first and last names.

Timeline

1620s: English colonists captured and enslaved Native people in Wampanoag territory in eastern New England.

1634: English colonists brought enslaved African people to the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

1641: Massachusetts became the first colony to legalize slavery with the following law: *“There shall never be any bond slavery, village or captivity amongst us unless it be lawful Captives taken in just wars, and such strangers as willingly sell themselves or are sold to us.”*

1654: Northampton colonists made a permanent settlement.

1676: Many Nipmuc people were captured and confined to Deer Island after King Philip’s War. Some Nipmuc and Wampanoag war captives were enslaved in eastern Massachusetts homes; others were sent to the West Indies.

1755-1764: The population of enslaved people in Massachusetts rose to 2.2% of the total population.

1773: A group of enslaved people petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts to abolish slavery, basing their argument on the growing American Independence movement. 1774: The population of Black people peaked in colonial New England at 16,034 people, 2.4% of the population. Connecticut had the largest enslaved population, 5,085 people.

1776: The American colonies declared independence from Great Britain, beginning the American Revolution. The Northampton population numbered 1,790.

1780: The Massachusetts Constitution went into effect, declaring "*all men are born free and equal, and have . . . the right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties.*"

1781: Elizabeth Freeman, a Black enslaved woman, sued her enslaver, Colonel John Ashley of Stockbridge. With the help of local attorney Theodore Sedgwick, she argued for her freedom on the grounds of the new Massachusetts Constitution and won.

1783: Quock Walker, a Black man from Worcester County, sued for his freedom on the same grounds as Elizabeth Freeman. His legal win caused Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice William Cushing to rule that slavery was incompatible with the new Massachusetts Constitution. With this ruling, slavery became illegal in Massachusetts.

1827: Slavery ended in New York, after a decade of gradual emancipation.

1842: The Northampton Association of Education and Industry founded a utopian abolitionist community in the village of Florence, attracting Black activists David Ruggles and Sojourner Truth.

1848: Slavery became illegal in Connecticut.

FAQ & Key Vocab

<i>Anticipated Questions</i>	<i>Suggested Responses</i>
What about? (Insert well known and successful African American suggesting all enslaved people were literate/achieved freedom/etc) - Sojourner Truth - Phillis Wheatley - Frederick Douglass - Lucy Terry - Agrippa Hull - etc...	Although many African American people enslaved and free resisted the systems of white supremacy that tried to oppress them, examples like _____ are not the majority of the enslaved experience in New England during the 18th century. They are exemplary but exceptions to the norm.
But weren't there "good enslavers"?	There were no "good enslavers." Different enslavers may have used different methods of control that may have included gift giving or promises of later freedom, but they all were enslavers who inherently treated other human beings as property.
Wasn't Northampton a center for abolition? Didn't Sojourner truth live here?	Northampton was a center for abolition starting in the mid 19th century. This exhibit focuses on the 18th century. Before people like Sojourner Truth and David Ruggles arrived here, Northampton was a small community like many others in New England that included wealthy enslavers.
Wasn't slavery in the North better/less harsh/etc than slavery in the South?	Slavery in the North and South were different but had key commonalities. Enslaved status was inherited, people were viewed as property, and it operated on a system of white supremacy. Some differences include the level of surveillance, isolation, individualized control, and access to African-American communities
If everyone enslaved people and it was normalized, how was anyone supposed to know it was wrong? / It was a different time / any other excuse that they "wouldn't have known better"	Despite many wealthy individuals enslaving human beings, not all of them did. Various people during this period (including Jonathan Edwards's son) opposed slavery based on moral arguments. To enslave another person was a conscious choice with moral repercussions that individuals at the time understood and justified to themselves. White and Black people alike spoke out against

	slavery and made arguments against it in the 18th century.
But didn't native people also enslave others?	Yes, some Indigenous groups including various different Iroquoian people did participate in the system of slavery. However it was at a much smaller scale than their white counterparts. Enslavement within these communities was also usually not inheritable or race based in the way American Chattel slavery in both the northern and southern United States was.

Manumission - Documents freeing enslaved individuals are frequently referred to during the period as manumission documents. To manumit is to release from slavery.

Probate Inventory - When people die, both today and during the 18th century, their property is tallied up and recorded in a list called a probate inventory. Because enslaved individuals were considered property, they are included in these documents. When looking for enslaved individuals in history, probate inventory documents are some of the most helpful sources we have. They are still legal documents though and reside in the county probate court office.

Abolition - During the period of the 18th century there was not a strong "abolition movement" as there grew to be in the 19th century. When people refer to "abolition" they are likely referring to the 19th century political organized movement to abolish slavery. Today many people identify as abolitionists who are working to abolish the prison industrial complex as a legacy of the American system of slavery.

Gradual Emancipation - Many people in the 18th and 19th century that were critical of slavery advocated for "gradual emancipation" which unlike abolition would not free all enslaved individuals immediately. Instead individuals born after a certain year would be freed when they reached a certain age. All individuals not born before the cutoff would still be enslaved. Connecticut used a system of gradual emancipation, meaning there were still enslaved people there through the 19th century.

Colony, colonists, settler colonialism - In the 17th century white people arrived in the Americas to build towns, infrastructure, and communities to support their European nations of origin. In doing so they displaced many native residents. Settler colonialism, as practiced in the Americas strove to exploit the natural resources of the landscape while establishing a permanent presence and creating a new society therein. Colonists were agents of this process by establishing colonies and using enslaved labor to further their goals.

Commodification - The action or process of turning a thing or person into a valuable piece of property for trade. White colonists commodified human beings when they sold, traded, and purchased enslaved people. Even post Massachusetts abolition, Massachusetts participated in the commodification of human beings by trading for goods only available through enslavement (cotton, rum, tobacco, sugar, indigo, rice, etc)

Plantation - A large estate functioning to cultivate crops (ex. Sugar, cotton, coffee, tobacco, etc). Frequently the site of mass enslavement, especially in the 17-19th century American South.) The only New England place to feature large plantation style agriculture and enslavement was Rhode Island.

Bathsheba Hull

Document: Surety Bond signed by Ebenezer Pomeroy, March 20, 1748/9

Source: Northampton Town Papers, Box 2, Folder 6
Forbes Library, Northampton, Mass.

On March 20, 1748/9, Ebenezer Pomeroy signed this agreement to pay the Northampton town treasurer the sum of 50 pounds in the event that Bathsheba Hull became unable to support herself. Pomeroy had previously "Manumitted Discharged & sett free" Bathsheba Hull.

Know all men by these Presents that Ebenezer
Pomeroy of Northampton Within y^e County of
Hampshire In his Majesty's Province of the
Massachusetts Bay In New-England Esq^r Bath
Pomeroy Covenant and Engage for himself
his heirs, Executors or Administrators to
Wee and Grantly Pay unto Eben^r Hunt of
Northampton aforesaid, as Town Treasurer
or to his Successor in sd Trust the sum of
Fifty Pounds upon y^e Condition following
Signed with his hand & sealed with his
seal this 20th day of March In y^e 22th year
of y^e Reigne of George y^e second of Great
Britain France & Ireland King &c: 1748

Take Condition of y^e aforesaid Obligation is such
That Whereas the sd Eben Pomeroy had a Negro Slave
or Servant Named, And Christened Bathsheba, Whome
the sd Pomeroy hath Manumitted Discharged & sett free
Now if y^e sd Pomeroy shall Secure & indemnifie
the Town of Northampton from all Charge from
or about sd Negro Servant In Case she by y^e sd
Lemans or any other way be unable to support
her self: Then y^e Obligation first above said to
Remain & Continue but other wise to Remaine
In Full Force Power and Virtue
Signed Sealed & Delivered Eben^r Pomeroy
In Presence of us
Noah Strong
John Partridge Hull

Know all men by these Present that Ebenezer
Pomroy of Northampton within y^e County of
Hampshire in his Majesty's Province of the
Massachusetts Bay in New-England Esq^r hath
Remose Covenant and Engage for himself
his heirs, Executors or Administrators to
Wee and Gracely Pay unto Eben^r Hunt of
Northampton aforesaid, or his Treasurer
or to his Successor in so much the sum of
Fifty Pounds upon y^e Condition following
Signed with his hand & Sealed with his
Seal this 20th day of March In y^e 22th year
of y^e Reigne of George y^e Second of Great
Britain France & Ireland King &c: 1748

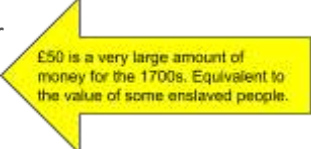
Take Condition of y^e Above said Obligation, & such
What Whereas the sd Eben^r Pomroy had a Negro Slave
or Servant Named, and Christened Bathsheba, Whome
Take sd Pomroy hath Manumitted & discharged & sett free
Now if y^e sd Pomroy shall Secure & Indemnify
the Crown of Northampton from all Charge from
or about sd Negro Servant in Case she by Signes
Leinany or any other ways be incapable to support
her self: Then y^e Obligation first above said to
Remain & determine but other wise In Remission
In full Force Power and Virtue
Signed Sealed & delivered Eben^r Pomroy
In Presence of us

Noah Strong

John Partridge Bull

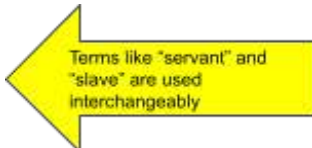
Transcription

Know all men by these Present that Ebenzer Pomroy of Northampton within ye County of Hampshire in his Majesty's Province of the Massachusetts Bay In New England E / y^e Doth Promise, Covenant and Engage for himself his heirs, Executors or Administrators to wee and Truly Pay unto Eben^e Hunt of Northampton aforesaid, as Towne Treasurer or to his successor In sd Trust **the sum of Fifty Pounds** upon y^e condition following Signed With his hand & sealed with his seal this 20th day of March In y^e 22th year of ye Reign of George y^e Second of Great Britain France & Ireland King &c 1748/9

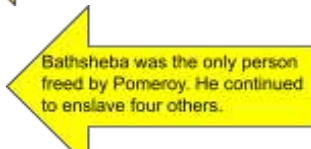


£50 is a very large amount of money for the 1700s. Equivalent to the value of some enslaved people.

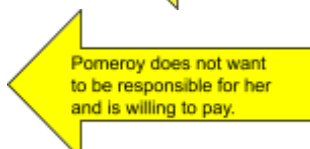
The Condition of ye Above said Obligation Is such That Whereas the sd Eben^e Pomroy had a **Negro Slave or Servant** Named, and chrisned Bathsheba, whom The sd Pomroy hath, **Manumitted Discharged & sett free** Now if ye sd Pomroy shall secure & Indemnifie the town of Northampton from all Charge from or about sd Negro servant **in case She by siknes lamenes or any other way be incapable to support her self** : then ye Obligation first Above said to lean and ditermine but other wise to remain In full force power and virtue



Terms like "servant" and "slave" are used interchangeably



Bathsheba was the only person freed by Pomeroy. He continued to enslave four others.



Pomeroy does not want to be responsible for her and is willing to pay.

Signed sealed and dilivered Eben^e Pomeroy
In Presence of us —
Noah Strong
John Partridge Bull

Surety bond signed by Ebenezer Pomeroy on March 20, 1748/9.

Discussion Questions

Evidence Based Questions

1. Who are the main people mentioned in this document?
2. How do Ebenezer Pomeroy and Bathsheba Hull know each other?
3. How much did Ebenezer Pomeroy pay the town to rid himself of the responsibility to support Bathsheba?

Interpretation Based Questions

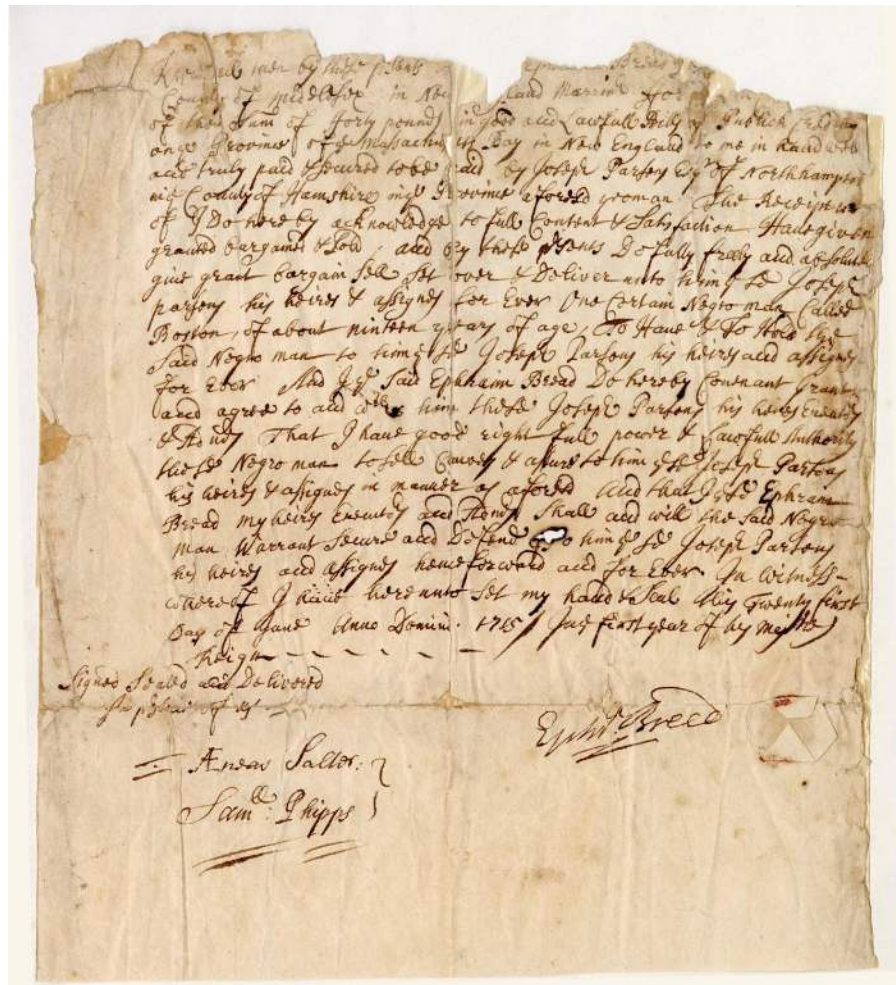
1. Why might Ebenezer Pomeroy choose to free Bathsheba instead of selling her?
2. How might Bathsheba have supported herself when she no longer lived with the Pomeroy's?
3. Why would the town require Ebenezer Pomeroy to pay money when he freed Bathsheba?

Boston

Document: Receipt, Ephraim Breed of Middlesex County to Joseph Parsons Jr. (1647-1729) of Northampton, for a "man Called Boston" June 21, 1715.

Source: Forbes Library, Northampton, Mass.

In 1715, Joseph Parsons, Jr. (1647-1729) of Northampton purchased from Ephraim Breed, Mariner, of Middlesex County a man called "Boston."



Know all men by these presents
County of Middlesex in New
England and lawful City of Publick
and Province of Massachusetts Bay in New England to me in hand
and truly paid Sheweth to be
and County of Hampshire in
of I do hereby acknowledge to full content & Satisfaction. Have given
granted bargain & sold and by these presents I do fully freely and absolutely
quit grant bargain sell let over & deliver unto him & to Joseph
Parson his heirs & assigns for ever One certain Negro man called
Boston, of about nineteen years of age, To Have & To Hold the
said Negro man to him & to Joseph Parson his heirs and assigns
for ever And I & said Ephraim Breed do hereby Covenant Grant
warrant agree to and defend him the said Joseph Parson his heirs and assigns
to wit That I have good right full power & lawful authority
the said Negro man to sell convey & assign to him & to Joseph Parson
his heirs & assigns in manner as aforesaid And that I & said Ephraim
Breed my heirs and assigns shall and will the said Negro
man Warrant Secure and defend to him & to Joseph Parson
his heirs and assigns herefore and for ever. In witness
whereof I have hereunto set my hand & seal this twenty first
day of June Anno Domini. 1715 / Just first year of his Majesty



Signed Sealed and Delivered
in presence of us

Andas Sallor. 2
Sam. Phipps 1

Ephraim Breed

Transcription

Know all men by those presents ... [Ephraim Breed]
County of Middlesex in New [Eng]land Marriner ...
of the sum of forty pounds in good and Lawfull Bills of Publick credit
on ye Province of ye Massachusetts Bay in New England to me in hand with
and truly paid & secured to be paid by Joseph Parsons Esq of Northhampton
in ye County of Hamshire in ye Province aforsd yeoman. The [?] Receipt is
of I Do hereby acknowledge to full Content & Satisfaction Have given
granted bargained & sold and by those Grants Do fully freely and absolutely
give grant bargain sell [?] Lot over & Deliver unto him ye sd Joseph
parsons his heirs & assigns for ever One certain Negro man called
Boston, of about nineteen years of age, to Have & to Hold the
Said Negro man to him ye sd Joseph Parsons his heirs and assigns
for ever And I ye said Ephraim Breed Do hereby Covenant Grant
and agree to and with him the sd Joseph Parsons his heirs Executory
& [Assigns?] That I have good right full power & Lawfull Authority
the sd Negro man to Sell Convey & afford to him the sd Joseph Parsons
his heirs & assigns in manner of aforsd And that I ye sd Ephraim
Breed my heirs Executory and the sd Shall and will the Said Negro
Man Warrant Secured and Defend [illegible; paper burned] him ye sd Joseph Parsons
his heirs and assigns hence forward and for Ever. In witness –
whereof I have here unto set my hand & seal this Twenty first
Day of June Anno Domini 1715 / in y^e first year of his majesties
reign
Signed Sealed and Delivered
Joseph Parsons Esq [?]

40£ is a very large amount of money for the 1700s. Equivalent to over \$10,000.

Because enslaved people were considered property, they could be bought, sold, and inherited.

Ephrm Breed

AENEAS Saltor

Sam^{ll} Phipps

Receipt, Ephraim Breed to Joseph Parsons Jr. (1647-1729) for “Boston,” June 21, 1715.

Discussion Questions

Evidence Based Questions

1. What are the names of the enslaver and the enslaved person mentioned in this document?
2. When and where was this document written?
3. How old was the enslaved person mentioned in this document?

Interpretation Based Questions

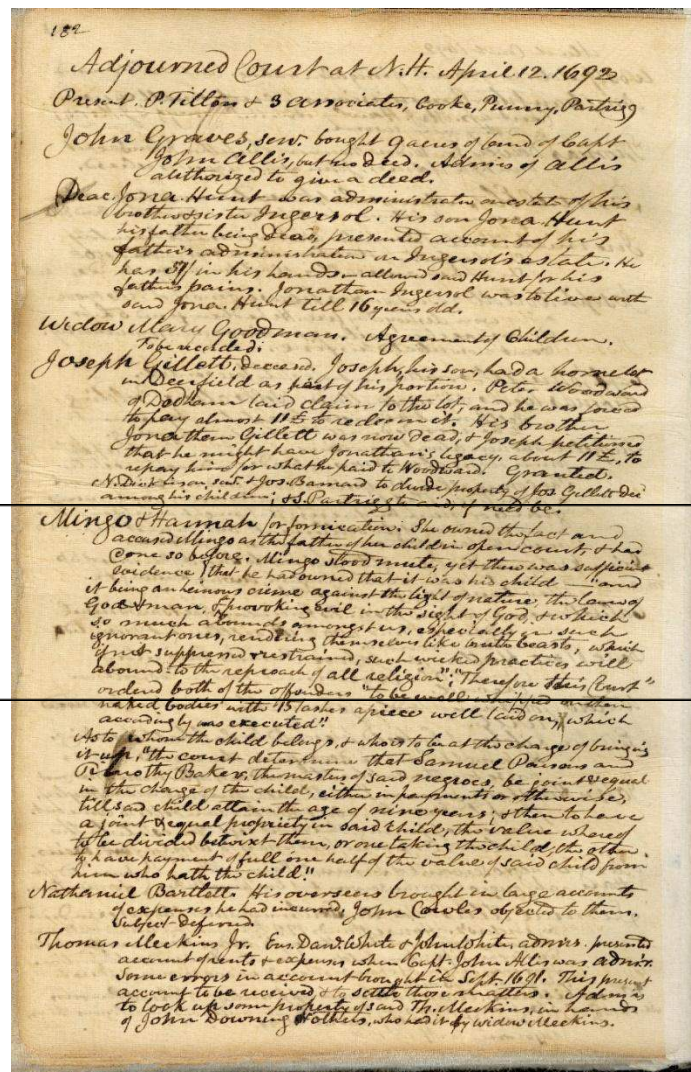
1. Why do you think the document mentions Joseph Parsons *and his heirs* so frequently? Why are the heirs of Joseph Parsons important to a document like this?
2. What is the purpose of this document? Why would Joseph Parsons need it?
3. Do you think Boston had any agency or say in the creation of this document? Why or why not?

Hannah, Her Baby, and Mingo

Document: Transcription by Sylvester Judd of a court document dated April 12, 1692.

Source: Judd Manuscript, Volume: Hampshire Matters, page 182.
Forbes Library, Northampton, Mass.

This document is a transcription of a court document about the punishment of Hannah and Mingo for having a child out of wedlock and the court decision that "the child belongs" equally to the enslaver of Hannah (Timothy Baker) and the enslaver of Mingo (Samuel Parsons)



Adjourned Court at N.H. April 12. 1692

Present. P. Tilton & 3 associates, Cooke, Punny, Parting

John Graves, sew. bought 9 acres of land of Capt John Allis, but no deed. Admis of Allis authorized to give a deed.

Deac. Jona. Hunt was administrator of estate of his brother sister Ingersol. His son Jona. Hunt his father being dead, presented account of his father's administration on Ingersol's estate. He has 87 in his hands - allowed said Hunt for his father's pains. Jonathan Ingersol was to live with said Jona. Hunt till 16 years old.

Widow Mary Goodman. Agreement of Children.

To be recalled;

Joseph Gillett, deceased. Joseph, his son, had a home lot in Deerfield as part of his portion. Peter Woodward of Dedham laid claim to the lot, and he was forced to pay almost 11 £ to redeem it. His brother Jona. then Gillett was now dead, & Joseph petitioned that he might have Jonathan's legacy, about 11 £, to repay him for what he paid to Woodward. Granted. N. Dickerson, sec. & Jos. Barnard to divide property of Jos. Gillett due among his children; ss Parting to aid, if need be.

Mingo & Hannah for fornication. She owned the fact and accused Mingo as the father of her children open court, & has done so before. Mingo stood mute, yet there was sufficient evidence that he had owned that it was his child - and it being an heinous crime against the light of nature, the laws of God & man, & provoking evil in the sight of God, & which so much abounds amongst us, especially in such ignorant ones, rendering themselves like brute beasts, which if not suppressed & restrained, such wicked practices will abound to the reproach of all religion; "Therefore this Court" ordered both of the offenders "to be well whipped on their naked bodies with 15 lashes apiece well laid on, which accordingly was executed."

As to whom the child belongs, & who is to bear the charge of bringing it up, "the court determined that Samuel Parsons and Timothy Baker, the masters of said negroes, be joint & equal in the charge of the child, either in payments or otherwise, till said child attain the age of nine years; & then to have a joint & equal propriety in said child, the value whereof to be divided betwixt them, or one taking the child, the other to have payment of full one half of the value of said child from him who hath the child."

Nathaniel Bartlett. His overseers brought in large accounts of expenses he had incurred. John Cowles objected to them. Subject - Deferend.

Thomas Meekins Jr. Esr. David White & John White, admrs. presented account of rents & expenses when Capt. John Allis was admr. Some errors in account brought in Sept. 1691. This present account to be received & to settle those matters. Admis to look up some property of said Th. Meekins, in hands of John Downing & others, who had it of widow Meekins.

Transcription of Selected Passage

182

Adjourned Court at N.H. April 12. 1692

Present. P. Tilton & 3 associates, Cooke, Pumry, Partrigg

...

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Fornication cases were not uncommon but this case is different for many reasons.

Most fornication cases do not accuse the father, just the mother. But because both are enslaved, both are being brought to court.

This is especially harsh language, even for 17th century court cases. The court comparing Hannah and Mingo to animals reflects their racialized status.

There is intense fear here of others participating in similar acts, both enslaved and free. Puritan doctrine must make an example out of these two.

Neither Hannah nor Mingo get to take custody of their own child. The child is “owned” by their enslavers not their parents.

The understanding here is that Baker and Marshall can sell the child and split the profits. They view the child solely in financial terms, not as a human.

Page 182 from the Judd Manuscript, Hampshire Matters volume about Mingo, Hannah, and their baby and their enslavers Samuel Parsons and Timothy Baker. Collection of Forbes Library, Northampton, Mass.

Discussion Questions

Evidence Based Questions

1. What kind of document is this? When and where was it written?
2. Why have Mingo and Hannah been brought to court?
3. What is going to happen to Hannah, Mingo, and the baby as a result of this document?

Interpretation Based Questions

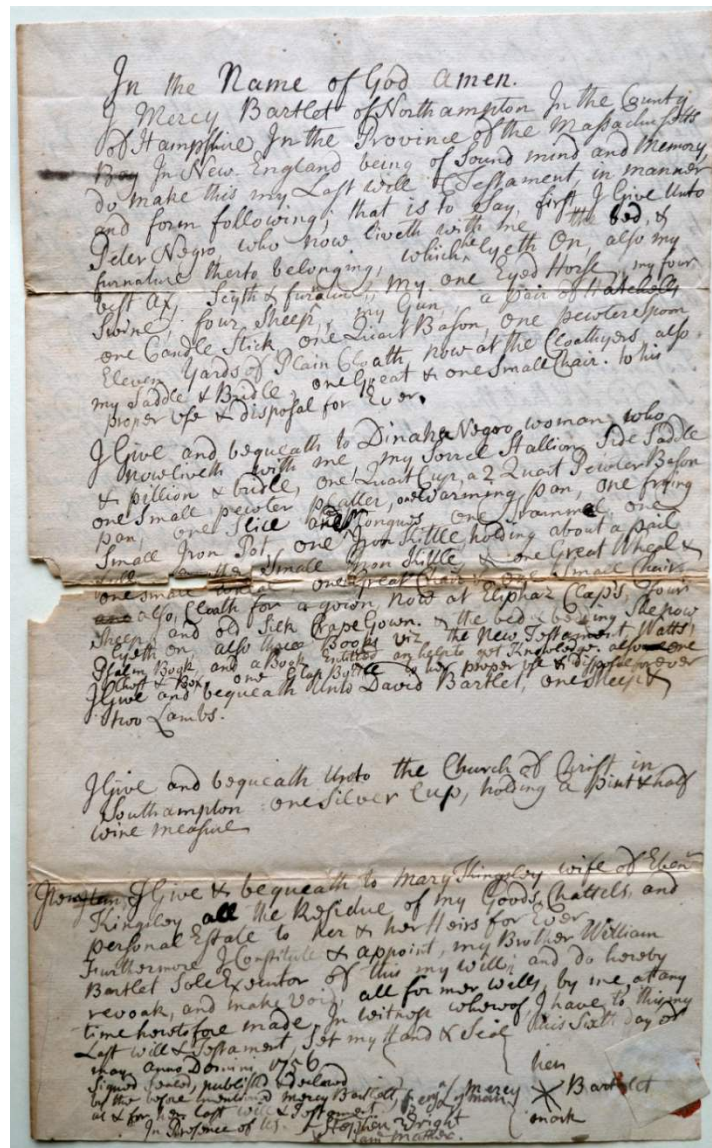
1. Why might the court take children born out of wedlock between enslaved individuals this seriously?
2. Why do you think so much of the case is spent discussing the fate of Hannah's unborn child?
3. What might some of the court's goals be here in punishing Hannah and Mingo so severely?

Dinah and Peter

Document: Will of Mercy Bartlett, May 6, 1756

Source: Hampshire County Probate Records

Dinah and Peter were freed in 1755 by the will of Joseph Bartlett. Both remained in the household of his widow Mercy Bartlett. When Mercy Bartlett died four years after her husband, she left Dinah and Peter some of her belongings, as itemized in her will.



In the Name of God Amen.

Mercy Bartlet of Northampton in the County
of Hampshire in the Province of the Massachusetts
Bay in New England being of Sound mind and Memory
do make this my Last will & Testament, in manner
and form following; that is to say, first I give unto
Peter Negro who now liveth with me ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{63d}, &
furniture thereto belonging, which ^{shelyeth} ~~shelyeth~~ On, also my
best Ax, Sighth & furniture, my one Eyed Horse, my four
Swine, four Sheep, my Gun, a pair of Hatchets
one Candle Stick, one Quait Bason, one pewter spoon
Eleven Yards of Plain Cloath now at the Coathys also
my Saddle & Bridle, one great & one small Chair. to his
proper use & disposal for ever.

I give and bequeath to Dinah Negro woman who
now liveth with me my Iron Stallions Side Saddle
& pillion & bridle, one Quait Cup, a 2 Quait Pewter Bason
one small pewter platter, one warming pan, one frying
pan, one Slice ~~and~~ Tongues one Hammele, one
Small Iron Pot, one Iron Kettle holding about a pail
~~small~~ ~~a~~ ~~the~~ ~~small~~ ~~Iron~~ ~~Kettle~~ ~~&~~ ~~one~~ ~~Great~~ ~~Wheel~~ ~~&~~
~~one~~ ~~small~~ ~~wheel~~ ~~&~~ ~~one~~ ~~great~~ ~~Chair~~ ~~&~~ ~~one~~ ~~small~~ ~~Chair~~
~~and~~ ~~also~~ ~~cloath~~ ~~for~~ ~~a~~ ~~gown~~ ~~now~~ ~~at~~ ~~Elphaz~~ ~~Capt~~ ~~s~~ ~~four~~
~~Sheep~~ ~~and~~ ~~old~~ ~~Silk~~ ~~Rape~~ ~~Gown~~ ~~&~~ ~~the~~ ~~bed~~ ~~&~~ ~~bedding~~ ~~She~~ ~~now~~
~~lyeth~~ ~~on~~ ~~also~~ ~~three~~ ~~Books~~ ~~viz~~ ~~the~~ ~~New~~ ~~Testament~~ ~~Watts~~
~~Psalm~~ ~~Book~~ ~~and~~ ~~a~~ ~~Book~~ ~~entitled~~ ~~an~~ ~~help~~ ~~to~~ ~~get~~ ~~knowledge~~ ~~also~~ ~~one~~
~~Chrift~~ ~~&~~ ~~Box~~ ~~one~~ ~~Clap~~ ~~Buttle~~ ~~&~~ ~~my~~ ~~proper~~ ~~use~~ ~~&~~ ~~disposal~~ ~~for~~ ~~ever~~
I give and bequeath unto David Bartlet, one Sheep
& two Lambs.

I give and bequeath unto the Church of Christ in
Southampton one Silver Cup, holding a pint & half
wine measure

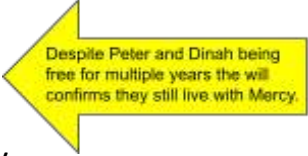
Jonathan I give & bequeath to Mary Thingley wife of Eben
Thingley ~~all~~ the Residue of my Goods, Chattels, and
personal Estate to her & her Heirs for ever
Furthermore I Constitute & appoint, my Brother William
Bartlet Sole Executor of this my will, and do hereby
revoke, and make void, all for more wills, by me at any
time heretofore made, In witness whereof I have to this my
Last will & Testament set my hand & Seal this Sixth day of
May, Anno Domini 1756
Signed sealed, published & declared
by the before mentioned Mercy Bartlet, person of full age
at & for her Last will & Testament
In presence of us, Stephen Wright
Samuel Mather.

her
Mercy
Bartlet
mark

Partial Transcription

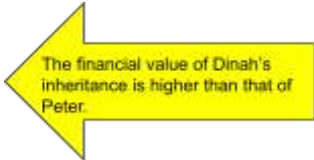
In the Name of God amen.

I Mercy Bartlet of Northampton for the County of Hampshire In the Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England being of Sound mind and Memory do make this my Last will and Testament, in manner and form following; that is to Say, **first I give Unto Peter Negro who now liveth with me** the bed, & furnature thereto belonging, which he lyeth On, also my best ax, Scyth & furnature my one Eyed horse, my four Swine, four sheep, my Gun, a pair of Hatchets, one Candle Stick, one quart basin, one pewter Spoon Eleven Yards of Plain Cloath now at the Cloathysr also my Saddle & Bridle, one Great & one Small Chair. to his prosper use and disposal for Ever.

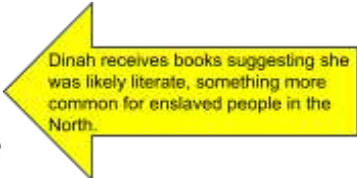


Despite Peter and Dinah being free for multiple years the will confirms they still live with Mercy.

I Give and bequeath to **Dinah a Negro woman who now liveth with me**, my Sorrel Stallion, Side Saddle & pillion & bridle, one Quart Cup, a 2 Quart Pewter Bason one Small pewter platter, one warming pan, one frying pan, one slice one [?] one Trammel, one small iron pot, one Iron Skillet, holding about a pail full, Small Iron Skillet, & one Great Wheel & one small wheel, one Great Chair & one Small Chair also cloath for a gown, now at Eliphas Clap's four Sheep and old Silk Crape Gown & the bed & bedding She now lyeth on, **also three books** viz. The New Testament, Watts' Psalm Book, and a Book Entitled on Help to get Knowledge. also one chest & Box, one Glass Bottle to her proper use & dispose for ever. I Give and bequeath Unto David Bartlet one Sheep & two lambs.



The financial value of Dinah's inheritance is higher than that of Peter.



Dinah receives books suggesting she was likely literate, something more common for enslaved people in the North.

I Give and bequeath Unto the Church of Christ in Southampton one Silver Cup holding a pint & half wine measure.

[?] I Give and bequeath to Mary Kingsley wife of Eben^r Kingsley all the Residue of my Goods, Chattels, and personal Estate to her and her heirs for Ever



Mercy only leaves her possessions to 3 individuals, she had no children.

Furthermore I constitute and appoint my Brother William
Bartlet Sole Executor of this my Will and do hereby
Revoak, and make void, all former wills by me at any
time heretofore made, In witness whereof, I have to this my
Last will and Testament, Set my Hand & Seal this Sixth day of
may anno domini 1756

Signed Sealed published & delivered
by the before mentioned Mercy Bartlett,
as & for her last will & Testament
Mercy Bartlet / her mark
In Presence of Stephen Wright,
Sam^l Mather
[Henry?] Lyman

Discussion Questions

Evidence Based Questions

1. What kind of document is this? When and why would Mercy be writing this?
2. Make a list of the items Mercy left for Peter
3. Make a list of the items Mercy left for Peter

Interpretation Based Questions

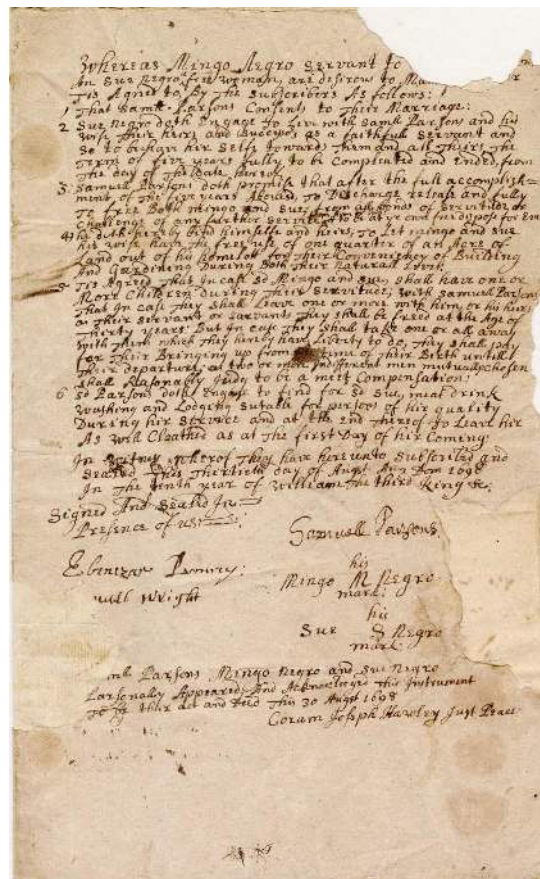
1. What do the objects Peter receives have in common with each other? Are there any that stand out?
2. What do the objects Mercy receives have in common with each other? Are there any that stand out?
3. What can these objects tell us about Peter and Dinah themselves, their skills, how they might have supported themselves after achieving freedom from the Bartletts?

Mingo and Sue

Document: Agreement between Mingo, Sue, and their enslaver Samuel Parsons, August 30, 1698

Source: Forbes Library, Northampton, MA

“Sue Negro a free woman” and Mingo wanted to marry in 1698. Samuel Parsons, Mingo’s enslaver, would allow them to marry and live together if Sue would agree to become enslaved to Parsons and his wife as “a faithful servant.” Mingo and Sue would be freed after five years of enslavement.



Whereas Mingo Negro servant to
An sue negro^{or} free woman, are desirous to Ma-
rrie Agree to, By the subscribers As follows:

- 1 That same Parsons Consents to their Marriage:
- 2 Sue negro doth Engage to live with same Parsons and his
wife their heirs and Successors, as a faithfull servant and
so to behave his selfe towards them and all theirs, the
term of five years fully to be compleated and ended, from
the day of the date hereof.
- 3 Samuel Parsons doth promise that after the full accomplish-
ment of the five years aforesaid, to Discharge release and fully
to free Both mingo and sue, from all bonds of servitude or
challenge of any further service, to be at yr own free disposal for ever.
- 4 He doth hereby bind himselfe and heirs; to Let mingo and sue
his wife have the free use of one quartier of an Acre of
Land out of his homelott for their Convenience of Building
and Gardening During Both their Natural Lives.
- 5 Its Agreed that In case so Mingo and sue, shall have one or
more Children during their servitude; with samuell Parsons
that In case they shall leave one or more with him, or his heirs
as their servant or servants they shall be freed at the Age of
thirty years: But In case they shall take one or all away
with them which they lawfully have Liberty to do, they shall pay
for their Bringing up from the time of their Birth untill
their departure, as two or more indifferent men mutually chosen
shall Reasonably Judge to be a meet Compensation:
- 6 so Parsons doth Engage to find for so sue, meat drink
washing and Lodging suitable for persons of his quality
During his service and at the end thereof to leave him
As well Cloathed as at the first Day of his Coming:

In witness whereof they have hereunto subscribed and
Sealed this thirtieth day of August An Dom 1698
In the tenth year of William the third King &c;

Signed And Sealed In
Presence of us:

Samuell Parsons.

Ebenazar Parney:
will Wright

his
Mingo M Negro
mark:

his
Sue S Negro
mark:

sa Parsons Mingo Negro and Sue Negro
Personally Appeared And Acknowledged this Instrument
to be their act and deed this 30 August 1698
Coram Joseph Hawley Just Peace.

Transcription

Whereas Mingo Negro Servant to [page ripped here]

An **Sue Negro a free woman are desirous to [Marry]** [page ripped here]

Tis agreed to, By The subscribers As follows:

1 That **Saml Parsons consents to Their marriage:**

2 Sue negro doth Engage To Live with Saml Parsons and his wife their heirs and successors as a faithfull servant and so to be=have hir self towards Them and all Theirs The Term of five years fully to be compleated and ended, from The day of the date hereof,

3: Samuell Parsons doth promise that after the full accomplish=ment of The five years Aforsesd ,To Discharge release and fully to free Both Mingo and Sue from all bonds of servitude or challenge of any further service from him or hir : & to be at yr own free dispose for Ever
4) he doth hereby bind himselfe and heirs; To Let mingo and sue his wife have The free use of one quarter of an Acre of Land out of his homelott for Their Conveniency of Building And gardining During Both Their Natural Lives.

5. Tis Agreed That **In case sd Mingo and Sue, shall have one or More children during Their servitude; with Samuell Parsons That In case They shall Leave one or more with him, or his heirs or Their servant or servants They shall be freed at the Age of Thirty years: But In case They shall take one or all away with Them which they hereby have Liberty to do, They shall pay for Their Bringing up from the time of Their Birth untill Their departure; as two or more Indifferent men mutually:chosen shall reasonably Judg to be a meet Compensation.:**

6 Sd Parsons doth Engage to find for sd Sue, meat drink washing and Lodging suitable for persons of hir quality During hir service and at the End Thereof to Leave hir As well Cloathed as at The first Day of hir coming; In witness whereof They have here unto subscribed and sealed this Thirtieth day of Augst Anno Dom 1698 In The Tenth year of William The third King &c Signed And Sealed In = Presence of us =:

Samuell Parsons

Ebenezer Pumroy

Mingo M Negro his mark: [the M]

Sue S Negro his mark: [the S]

[Samll] Parsons Mingo Negro and Sue Negro Personally Appeared, And Acknowledges This Instrument To be this act and Deed This 30 Augst 1698 Coram Joseph Hawley Just Peace:

Sue, a free Black woman wants to marry a man named Mingo, who is enslaved to Samuel Parsons. She needs the permission of Mingo's enslaver to do so.

Sue has to agree to virtually re-enslave herself to Mingo's enslaver if she wants to marry him.

Sue and Mingo must agree to enslave their potential children to Samuel Parsons to get married.

If Sue and Mingo want to leave and take their children with them they must pay Samuel Parsons.

Discussion Questions

Evidence Based Questions

1. Who are the three individuals involved in this document? What is their freedom status?
2. What do Sue and Mingo want to do, that they need Samuel Parsons permission for?
3. What will happen to any children Sue and Mingo have?

Interpretation Based Questions

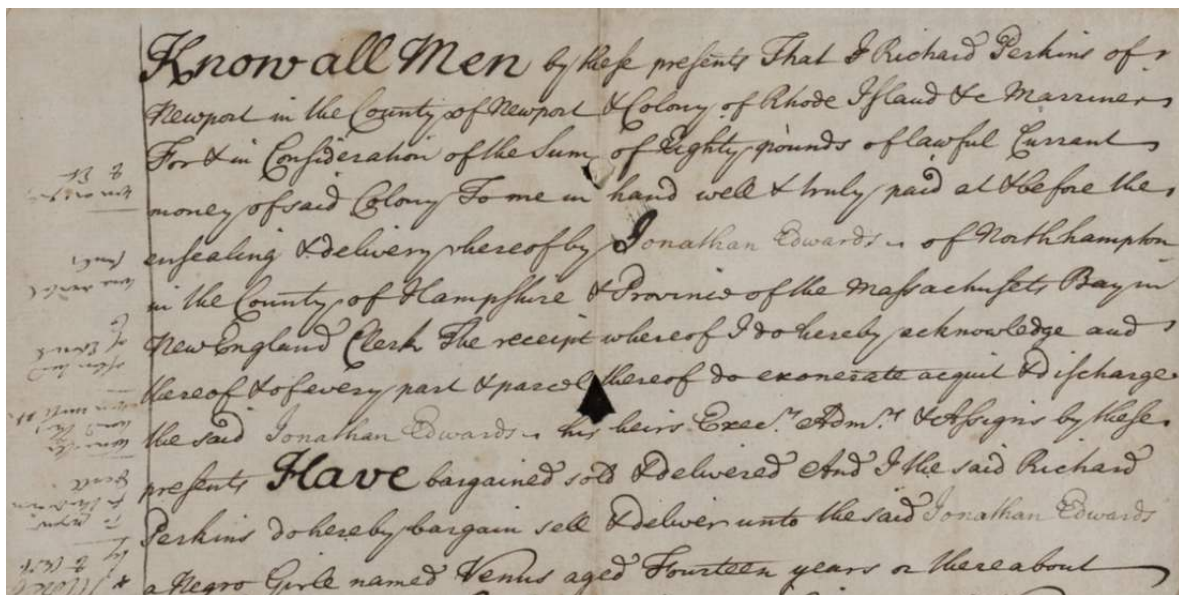
1. Why is it so important that Sue is a free woman? Why is that mentioned multiple times in the document?
2. Why might Boston be named after the city of Boston?
3. Why might Sue have agreed to sign this kind of contract, knowing it would enslave her and her future children? What are her other options?

Venus

Document: Bill of Sale for Venus, June 7, 1731.

Source: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

This bill of sale is from Richard Perkins of Newport, Rhode Island to Rev. Jonathan Edwards of Northampton for “a negro Girl named Venus aged Fourteen years or thereabout.” Years later, Edwards cut up the receipt and used the pieces for his sermon notebooks.



*Know all Men by these presents That I Richard Perkins of
Newport in the County of Newport Colony of Rhode Island &c. Merchants
For & in Consideration of the sum of Eighty pounds of lawful Current
money of said Colony To me in hand well & truly paid at the face the
enclosing & delivery whereof by Jonathan Edwards of Northampton
in the County of Hampshire & Province of the Massachusetts Bay in
New England Clerk. The receipt whereof I do hereby acknowledge and
hereof & of every part & parcel thereof do exonerate acquit & discharge
the said Jonathan Edwards his heirs Exors. Admrs. & Assigns by these
presents Have bargained sold & delivered And I the said Richard
Perkins do hereby bargain sell & deliver unto the said Jonathan Edwards
a Negro Girl named Venus aged Fourteen years or thereabout*

Know all Men by these presents That I Richard Perkins of
 Newport in the County of Newport Colony of Rhode Island & Mariners
 For & in Consideration of the Sum of Eighty pounds of lawful Current
 money of said Colony To me in hand well & truly paid at & before the
 sealing & delivery thereof by Jonathan Edwards of Northampton
 in the County of Hampshire & Province of the Massachusetts Bay in
 New England Clerk The receipt whereof I do hereby acknowledge and
 hereof & of every part & parcel thereof do exonerate acquit & discharge
 the said Jonathan Edwards his heirs Exors. Admrs. & Assigns by these
 presents **Have** bargained sold & delivered And I the said Richard
 Perkins do hereby bargain sell & deliver unto the said Jonathan Edwards
 a Negro Girl named Venus aged Fourteen years or thereabout

Transcription

Know all Men by Rep presents That I Richard Perkins of

Newport in the County of Newport & Colony of Rhode Island & Marriner

For in Consideration of the sum of Eighty pounds of lawful current

money of said Colony to me in hand well & truly paid at be for the

ensealing & delivery hereof by Jonathan Edwards of Northampton

in the County of Hampshire of Province of the Massachusetts Bay in

New England Clerk The receipt whereof I do hereby acknowledge and

thereof to every part and parcel thereof do exonerate acquit discharge

the said Jonathan Edwards his heirs Exec. Adm. alsigns by there

present Have bargained sold Delivered And I the said Richard

Perkins do hereby bargain sell Deliver unto Jonathan Edwards

a negro Girl named Venus aged Fourteen years or thereabout

Newport was the largest slave port in North America for the majority of the 18th century. People from all around travelled there to purchase enslaved people who had just arrived from Africa.

80 pounds during the 18th-century is roughly equivalent to over 20,000 USD

Jonathan Edwards was a very well known minister from Northampton. He went on to be a leader in the First Great Awakening and remembered as one of the most important American preachers.

Venus's enslavers do not even know her exact age. The name "Venus" was likely not her originally given name either. All of these choices work to dehumanize a young girl and enslave her.

A bill of sale dated June 7, 1731 from Richard Perkins of Newport, Rhode Island to Rev. Jonathan Edwards of Northampton for "a negro Girl named Venus aged Fourteen years or thereabout."

Discussion Questions

Evidence Based Questions

1. Who are the people mentioned in this document? Who is doing the buying? Who is doing the selling? Who is being sold?
2. When and where was this document written?
3. How old was the enslaved person mentioned in this document?

Interpretation Based Questions

1. The journey from Northampton, MA to Newport, RI would have likely taken Johnathan Edwards days. Why would he travel all this way?
2. Who is Richard Perkins? What is his job and role in this document?
3. This document says very little about who Venus is. Why might that be? What information about her is being left out?