

NYS Abolition with Columbia Archival Material

New York State Abolition Lessons
Lehman Center for American History

This lesson involves an immersive archival experience at Columbia's Rare Book and Manuscript Library, which can be tailored (e.g. length/specific documents/etc.) to fit your course's needs. If you are interested in visiting for this lesson (or for any others involving archival material), please contact Thai Jones at tsj2001@columbia.edu.

Learning Goals

Skills: Students will sharpen their critical thinking skills by exploring original archival documents. In doing so, they will practice using primary sources to formulate understandings and construct historical arguments about the past.

Content: Students will learn about the centrality of slavery in New York history and understand the importance of Black New Yorkers' role in abolition.

Activities Summary

Warmup (10 mins)

- Columbia instructor leads pair-share activity to activate students' prior knowledge about the history of slavery
- Columbia instructor provides brief necessary context about history of slavery in New York and the North, highlighting points like:
 - New York City was second only to Charleston, South Carolina, in the number of its enslaved population throughout the 1700s
 - Political leaders in New York pursued "gradual emancipation"
 - Thanks to the activism of Black New Yorkers, a second law ended slavery for all on July 4, 1827

Archival Activity (40 mins)

- In small groups, students explore and analyze archival documents while completing a handout that asks them to name and curate an exhibit related to a particular theme (e.g. young people and family, women and gender, government and politics, money and business, protest and activism)

Closing (10 mins)

- To assess student learning, Columbia instructor invites groups to share their takeaways about the archival material, as documented on their handout