

Questions for Reading

An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, 1780 (Pennsylvania)

1. Who is the author of this document?
2. Who is set free by this Act? When?
3. What rationale is given for writing this Act?
4. Who does not become free?
5. For those who do get their freedom, are they able to do as they choose immediately?
6. Aside from providing freedom for certain people, how else does this Act serve for the benefit of people of African descent?
7. In what ways does this Act not serve in the interests of people of African descent?

Federal Documents, 1787, 1790, 1795 (Excerpts)

1. Who may become a citizen of the United States, based on the 1790 and 1795 Acts?
2. The words "slavery" and "slave" do not appear in the U.S. Constitution. How are enslaved people referenced?
3. How does the Constitution prohibit the abolition of slavery? Is this prohibition temporary or permanent?
4. What does the Constitution say about people running from one state to seek freedom in another?

George Washington's Last Will and Testament, 1799 (Excerpt)

1. Who is the author of this document?
2. Who is set free by this document? When?
3. Who is not set free by this document? Why are they not set free?
4. What provisions are made to support newly-freed people who need assistance? Which people in particular are singled out for assistance?