

American Slavery Documents

ACCESS THIS RUBENSTEIN LIBRARY INSTRUCTION SESSION GUIDE ONLINE AT:

guides.library.duke.edu/franklincenter_instruction/american_slavery_documents

BRIEF OVERVIEW

This class session encourages learners to engage with the [American Slavery Documents Collection](#). The collection contains an assortment of legal and personal documents related to slavery in the United States. Nearly all of the documents are singular and otherwise unrelated to the other, but as a composite, the collection brings to light the details of the lives and deaths of free and enslaved African Americans during the Antebellum and early Reconstruction Eras. It is one of many collections in the Rubenstein Library documenting African American life in the Antebellum South.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Find, view, and study** primary sources related to the period of slavery in the United States.
- **Understand** how archivists organize archival collections.
- **Navigate** an archival collection guide with digitized materials.
- **Understand** the experience of African Americans documented in the transactions of slave sales, manumissions, and trading.

BEFORE CLASS

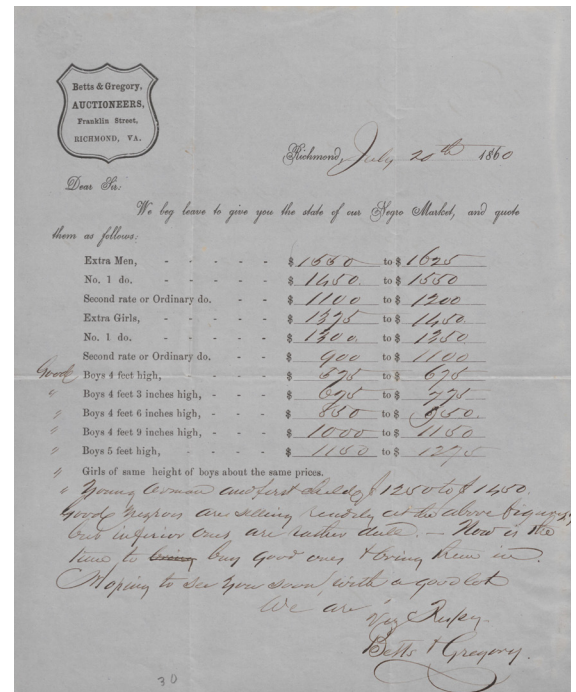
This collection is what archivists call an [artificial collection](#). That means the materials were not collected or collated organically, but pulled together over time by archivist/librarian(s) who were attempting to create a collection around a singular topic. This collection was likely curated in this manner because of the growth of research interest in African American history; in fact, it was once called the African American Miscellany collection.

This is not the most common practice in the archives field today. And in an effort to better describe the collection, the Rubenstein Library's Technical Service staff reprocessed the materials and the Duke University Library's Digital Production Center digitized the contents. The collection name was changed to its current title in 2015. Keep in mind that the items in the guide are not connected the way a traditional collection might be and each item can be considered a collection unto itself. Recently, the Rubenstein's Technical Services team is undertaking a project to individually catalog the items in the collection to center the description on the names the African American lives in the collection.

SESSION OUTLINE

Activity:

For this class session, you'll be working individually or in small groups to explore the [American Slavery Documents Collection](#) guide. First, you'll need to open the guide. Second, use the Slavery Series link on the left side of the page (under



Navigate the Collection) to open the collection inventory. Third, click on the item in order to view the document(s).

Things to keep in mind when using the collection:

- The inventory reflects the title of the content, geographic origin, and date (if known)
- There are 205 items in the entire collection
- You can also search for keywords in the search box at the top of the page
- Most of these documents are handwritten

Our activity is called a think-pair-share exercise, and it can work for a synchronous (e.g., a Zoom class session that includes breakout rooms) or asynchronous (e.g., a multi-step discussion on a Sakai forum) class sessions.

Activity 1: Identify a bill of sale for an enslaved person/people in the collection

Activity 2: Identify a manumission/emancipation record for an enslaved person/people in the collection

Activity 3: Locate a record that documents family/kinship connections among enslaved people

Activity 4: Identify three differences between these two bills of sale records:

- [Bill of Sale for Mary and Eliza, 1802](#)
- [Bill of Sale for George, Lucy, Louisa, and Piemus, 1849](#)

Group Discussion Questions:

After you've spent some time reviewing the collection, you'll be discussing these questions with your group mates. You may not get to discuss every question and are welcome to choose to discuss the question(s) you like best!

- How did you decide which document you picked for the first three activities?
- Did the guide provide accurate description of the document(s) you observed?
- List three things the document tells you about life at the time and in the place where it was created
- How does studying legal documents help you understand the institution of slavery?
- What question(s) do these documents bring up for you? What would you say is missing?

Additional Resources:

- Browse through [American Slavery Documents digital collection](#).

QUESTIONS?

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