

Choosing a Life of Slavery

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1. What do the three documents in this selection suggest that three different African Americans families chose to do?
2. When did Ann Jackson, Gabriel Todd and Agnes Calvin go to court?
3. What law did the Texas State Legislature pass in 1858?
4. What “sinister” reason hinted at in the introduction might account for Ms. Jackson, Mr. Todd and Ms. Calvin choosing to become slaves?
5. For what other reasons might you speculate would these three people choose to become slaves? Could there be a reason for a free person of color to choose his or her own master?

GLCO3840: Petition of a free black to Texas court to become a slave of Edward D. Martin Polk County, Texas, 20 March 1860.

6. Who is the petitioner in this document?
7. Who is the judge and in what court does he reside?
8. What basic facts about Gabriel Todd are stated in the petition? Why do you think these facts are stated?
9. Why might Gabriel Todd want to become a slave in the possession of Edward D. Martin?

GLC08955 Agnes Calvin In the District Court A free Negro Woman Marion County State Exparte of Texas

10. When does Agnes Calvin petition to become a slave?
11. What is going on in America at that time? How might this have affected Ms. Calvin’s situation as a free Black women living in Texas?
12. When did Ms. Calvin come to Texas?
13. Who else is in the care of Ms. Calvin? Give details.
14. Based upon the petition, what does Ms. Calvin want to happen to her daughters?
15. Who has Ms. Calvin selected as the person to be her and her daughter’s master?
16. Look at the bottom of the document facsimile (not the transcript) and find where Ms. Calvin signed the document. What did she do?
17. Can you or your teacher guess any reason why Ms. Calvin would choose to make her and her daughters the slaves of J.S.H. Hossack?

GLC06375 Petition of free negro, Ann Jackson to become a slave Gillespie, Texas, 4 October 1858.

18. Who prepared this document? What job did he have?
19. What does Ann Jackson claim about herself?
20. How does Ms. Jackson sign her name “in the presence of two reliable witnesses”?
21. Look at the document facsimile (not the transcript). What do you notice about the document itself that is odd, considering the petition was filed in Gillespie, Texas?