

# D. C. Emancipation Act

- Historic Background: Slavery in the District of Columbia
- Transcription: “An Act for the Release of certain Persons held to Service or Labor in the District of Columbia” (April 16, 1862)
- Discussion Questions: After Reading the D.C. Emancipation Act
- Primary Source: Schedule of Manumission to John A. Smith, Clerk



of Circuit Court of the District of Columbia

- Primary Source: Petition Submitted by Clark Mills
- Discussion Questions: Study the Emancipation Act Petitions
- Washington Post Reprint: “Slave named Philip Reid helped create Statue of Freedom that sits atop Capitol”
- Resource: Philip Reid
- Activity: Think Like a Journalist
- Answers: After Reading the D.C. Emancipation Act, Study the Emancipation Act Petitions

## An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

# Slavery in the District of Columbia

As settlers in the New World amassed more lands, they needed more laborers. Europeans who did not have financial resources, but were able to work and had skills in needed services, became indentured servants. They usually had to work seven years without pay to cover their passage to the colonies, their food and lodging. They were then free to work and live wherever they wanted. At first this worked for landowners, but as they needed long-term laborers, they turned to slavery.

Slave trade routes were already established. Spanish and Portuguese landowners had been using slaves for hundreds of years in their empires — in Hispanola, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Brazil. Massachusetts was the first English colony to make slavery legal, in 1641.

“When the District of Columbia was established in 1800, the laws of Maryland, including its slave laws, remained in force. Additional laws on slavery and free blacks were then made by the District, and by Southern standards its slave codes were moderate,” according to the Library of Congress American Treasures Memory website. Examples of the “moderate” provisions include allowing slaves to hire out their services and to live apart from their masters.

Slaves were treated as property to be owned and sold. With D.C. located between plantations, north and south of it, slave

sales abounded. Slave markets were held at Lafayette Square directly north of the White House, and in large markets on what is now the National Mall. Numerous smaller “slave pens” were positioned in “nearly every neighborhood and rural area of the District,” as reported in *Historical Political Economy of Washington*. One of the best known slave pens was owned by a man named Robey. It and a slave pen owned by slave trader James Burch were located near today’s Smithsonian Air and Space Museum and the Department of Education.

As early as the 1830s, abolitionists focused on the presence of slaves and slave markets in D.C. Publications such as *Slave Market of America* reported examples and illustrated the acts they abhorred. The capture in 1848 of slaves, many of whom worked in Washington homes and hotels, aboard *The Pearl* brought more attention to slavery, especially in D.C. Then-Congressman Abraham Lincoln introduced a bill on January 10, 1849, for the gradual abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia.

By the 1850s, D.C. was home to the largest slave market in North America. The Compromise of 1850 abolished the slave trade in D.C. on September 20, 1850, but allowed slavery to continue there. Records indicate that by 1860 D.C. was home to 11,131 free blacks and 3,185 slaves.



WOOD ENGRAVING FROM SKETCH BY F. DEILMAN, PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

## Celebration of the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia, April 19, 1866

This illustration from *Harper's Weekly* depicts African Americans celebrating the fourth anniversary of the bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia.

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**Slavery in the District of Columbia, *continued***

The National Archives summarizes the last step of abolishing slavery in D.C. — The District of Columbia Emancipation Act:

*On April 16, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed a bill ending slavery in the District of Columbia. Passage of this law came 8 1/2 months before President Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation. The act brought to a conclusion decades of agitation aimed at ending what antislavery advocates called “the national shame” of slavery in the nation’s capital. It provided for immediate emancipation, compensation to former owners who were loyal to the Union of up to \$300 for each freed slave, voluntary colonization of former slaves to locations outside the United States, and payments of up to \$100 for each person choosing emigration. Over the next 9 months, the Board of Commissioners appointed to administer the act approved 930 petitions, completely or in part, from former owners for the freedom of 2,989 former slaves.*

*Although its combination of emancipation, compensation to owners, and colonization did not serve as a model for the future, the District of Columbia Emancipation Act was an early signal of slavery’s death.*

**Sources**

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm009.html>

**Slavery in the Capital**

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured\\_documents/dc\\_emancipation\\_act/](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/dc_emancipation_act/)

**The District of Columbia Emancipation Act**

[http://mrlincolnanfreedom.org/content\\_inside.asp?ID=37&subjectID=3](http://mrlincolnanfreedom.org/content_inside.asp?ID=37&subjectID=3)

**District of Columbia**

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h3139.html>

**E.S. Aaby description of a Washington, D.C., slave pen**

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10103500>

**Failed Escape Sheds New Light on D.C. Slavery**

<http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/wash/dc30.htm>

**Lafayette Square Historic District**

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2951.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2951.html)

**The Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Act**

<http://faculty.isi.org/catalog/resource/view/id/1067>

**Slave Market of America**

<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0907/5913.html>

**Congress bans slave trade in D.C. Sept. 20, 1850**



## TRANSCRIPTION

# An Act for the Release of certain Persons held to Service or Labor in the District of Columbia

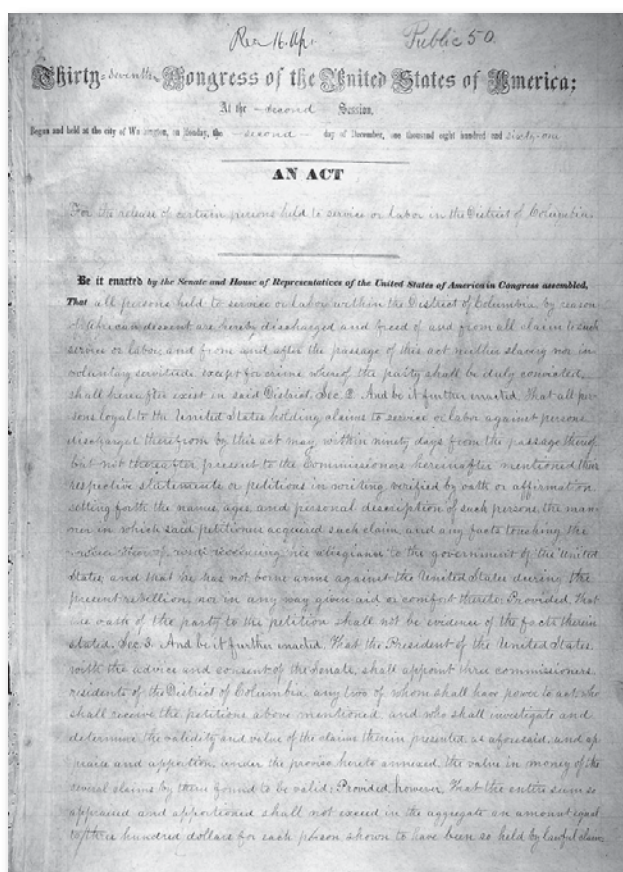
Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That all persons held to service or labor within the District of Columbia by reason of African descent are hereby discharged and freed of and from all claim to such service or labor; and from and after the passage of this act neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except for crime, whereof the party shall be duly convicted, shall hereafter exist in said District.

**Sec. 2.** *And be it further enacted*, That all persons loyal to the United States, holding claims to service or labor against persons discharged therefrom by this act, may, within ninety days from the passage thereof, but not thereafter, present to the commissioners hereinafter mentioned their respective statements or petitions in writing, verified by oath or affirmation, setting forth the names, ages, and personal description of such persons, the manner in which said petitioners acquired such claim, and any facts touching the value thereof, and declaring his allegiance to the Government of the United States, and that he has not borne arms against the United States during the present rebellion, nor in any way given aid or comfort thereto: *Provided*, That the oath of the party to the petition shall not be evidence of the facts therein stated.

**Sec. 3.** *And be it further enacted*, That the President of the United States, with the advice and consent of the Senate, shall appoint three commissioners, residents of the District of Columbia, any two of whom shall have power to act, who shall receive the petitions above mentioned, and who shall investigate and determine the validity and value of the claims therein presented, as aforesaid, and appraise and apportion, under the proviso hereto

annexed, the value in money of the several claims by them found to be valid: *Provided, however*, That the entire sum so appraised and apportioned shall not exceed in the aggregate an amount equal to three hundred dollars for each person shown to have been so held by lawful claim: *And provided, further*, That no claim shall be allowed for any slave or slaves brought into said District after the passage of this act, nor for any slave claimed by any person who has borne arms against the Government of the United States in the present rebellion, or in any way given aid or comfort thereto, or which originates in or by virtue of any transfer heretofore made, or which shall hereafter be made by any person who has in any manner aided or sustained the rebellion against the Government of the United States.

**Sec. 4.** *And be it further enacted*, That said commissioners shall, within nine months from the passage of this act, make a full and final report of their proceedings, findings, and appraisement, and shall deliver the same to the Secretary of the Treasury, which report shall be deemed and taken to be conclusive in all respects, except as hereinafter provided; and the Secretary of the Treasury shall, with like exception, cause the amounts so apportioned to said claims to be paid from the Treasury of the United States to the parties found by said report to be entitled thereto as aforesaid, and the same shall be received in full and complete compensation: *Provided*, That in cases where petitions may be filed presenting conflicting claims, or setting up liens, said commissioners shall so specify in said report, and payment shall not be made according to the award of said commissioners until a period of sixty days shall have elapsed, during which time any petitioner claiming an interest in



NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

**The original Act passed by Congress to end slavery in the District of Columbia, April 16, 1862.**

## TRANSCRIPTION, *continued*

the particular amount may file a bill in equity in the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia, making all other claimants defendants thereto, setting forth the proceedings in such case before said commissioners and their actions therein, and praying that the party to whom payment has been awarded may be enjoined from receiving the same; and if said court shall grant such provisional order, a copy thereof may, on motion of said complainant, be served upon the Secretary of the Treasury, who shall thereupon cause the said amount of money to be paid into said court, subject to its orders and final decree, which payment shall be in full and complete compensation, as in other cases.

**Sec. 5.** *And be it further enacted,* That said commissioners shall hold their sessions in the city of Washington, at such place and times as the President of the United States may direct, of which they shall give due and public notice. They shall have power to subpoena and compel the attendance of witnesses, and to receive testimony and enforce its production, as in civil cases before courts of justice, without the exclusion of any witness on account of color; and they may summon before them the persons making claim to service or labor, and examine them under oath; and they may also, for purposes of identification and appraisal, call before them the persons so claimed. Said commissioners shall appoint a clerk, who shall keep files and [a] complete record of all proceedings before them, who shall have power to administer oaths and affirmations in said proceedings, and who shall issue all lawful process by them ordered. The Marshal of the District of Columbia shall personally, or by deputy, attend upon the sessions of said commissioners, and shall execute the process issued by said clerk.

**Sec. 6.** *And be it further enacted,* That said commissioners shall receive in compensation for their services the sum of two thousand dollars each, to be paid upon the filing of their report; that said clerk shall receive for his services the sum of two hundred dollars per month; that said marshal shall receive such fees as are allowed by law for similar services performed by him in the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia; that the Secretary of the Treasury shall cause all other reasonable expenses of said commission to be audited and allowed, and that said compensation, fees, and expenses shall be paid from the Treasury of the United States.

**Sec. 7.** *And be it further enacted,* That for the purpose of carrying this act into effect there is hereby appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, a sum not exceeding one million of dollars.

**Sec. 8.** *And be it further enacted,* That any person or persons who shall kidnap, or in any manner transport or procure to be

taken out of said District, any person or persons discharged and freed by the provisions of this act, or any free person or persons with intent to re-enslave or sell such person or person into slavery, or shall re-enslave any of said freed persons, the person or persons so offending shall be deemed guilty of a felony, and on conviction thereof in any court of competent jurisdiction in said District, shall be imprisoned in the penitentiary not less than five nor more than twenty years.

**Sec. 9.** *And be it further enacted,* That within twenty days, or within such further time as the commissioners herein provided for shall limit, after the passage of this act, a statement in writing or schedule shall be filed with the clerk of the Circuit court for the District of Columbia, by the several owners or claimants to the services of the persons made free or manumitted by this act, setting forth the names, ages, sex, and particular description of such persons, severally; and the said clerk shall receive and record, in a book by him to be provided and kept for that purpose, the said statements or schedules on receiving fifty cents each therefor, and no claim shall be allowed to any claimant or owner who shall neglect this requirement.

**Sec. 10.** *And be it further enacted,* That the said clerk and his successors in office shall, from time to time, on demand, and on receiving twenty-five cents therefor, prepare, sign, and deliver to each person made free or manumitted by this act, a certificate under the seal of said court, setting out the name, age, and description of such person, and stating that such person was duly manumitted and set free by this act.

**Sec. 11.** *And be it further enacted,* That the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, is hereby appropriated, to be expended under the direction of the President of the United States, to aid in the colonization and settlement of such free persons of African descent now residing in said District, including those to be liberated by this act, as may desire to emigrate to the Republics of Hayti or Liberia, or such other country beyond the limits of the United States as the President may determine: *Provided,* The expenditure for this purpose shall not exceed one hundred dollars for each emigrant.

**Sec. 12.** *And be it further enacted,* That all acts of Congress and all laws of the State of Maryland in force in said District, and all ordinances of the cities of Washington and Georgetown, inconsistent with the provisions of this act, are hereby repealed.

**Approved, April 16, 1862.**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

# After Reading the D.C. Emancipation Act

### Section 1

1. Summarize the main provision of the Act.
2. Why did the “Act for the Release” apply to persons of African descent only within the District of Columbia?
3. What is the only allowable reason for slavery or involuntary servitude in D.C. after passage of the Act?

### Section 2

4. Who are “persons loyal to the United States”?
5. How long do individuals holding slaves have to submit their petitions?
6. List the information that is required in the petition. List seven categories or types of information.

### Section 3

7. What was the job assigned to three appointed commissioners?
8. What was the most the commissioners could compensate slaveholders for each slave who was manumitted?
9. What two additional conditions were required of the slaveholder?

### Section 4

10. What must the commissioners supply the Secretary of the Treasury within nine months of passage of the Act?
11. For what are slaveholders being “compensated”?

### Section 5

12. The President of the United States was directly involved in the function of the three commissioners. Tell what the President was to do. What provisions help to ensure fair proceedings by the commissioners?
13. A clerk was also to be appointed. Why is his role important to historians and descendants of the manumitted slaves?

### Section 6

14. This section addresses the payment to be given to the three commissioners, their clerk, and a marshal for their services. Who is responsible to see that each is accurately compensated?

### Section 7

15. Use the formula that \$1 of 1862 dollars is equivalent to \$22.75 of 2012 dollars. The Act stipulates that compensation may not exceed one million dollars. What is that amount in today’s dollars?

### Section 8

16. What is the punishment to be given those who try to corrupt the provisions of the Act?

### Section 9

17. Former slaveholders had twenty (20) days after the passage of the Act to submit in writing a schedule for employing their freed slaves. What information did they have to provide in order to meet the requirements of the Act?

### Section 10

18. What proof would former slaves have that they had legally been manumitted?

### Section 11

19. Liberia, the Republic of Haiti and any other country that the President of the United States determines are to be given to freed slaves as options. These emigrants are to be given no more than 100 dollars to cover their expenses. Why do you think this provision was made in the Act?

### Section 12

20. Why are the laws of the State of Maryland referred to in this Act? Why do the ordinances of Georgetown also play into D.C. acts?

### Bonus Point

Payments of compensation to slave owners were not included in the Emancipation Proclamation or 13th Amendment that made slavery illegal in the United States when it was ratified in December 1865. Why do you think Lincoln included compensation to slaveholders in the D.C. Emancipation Act?



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## Original Document

## Schedule of Manumission of Clark Mills

By John A. Smith, Clerk of Circuit Court of the District of Columbia.

In pursuance of the Act of Congress, entitled an act for the release of certain persons held to service or labor in the District of Columbia, passed April 16<sup>th</sup> 1862, and in accordance with the 9<sup>th</sup> section thereof, we file a schedule of the following persons, of African descent made free at manumitted, by the afore-said act of Congress, & owned by me.

Wiz.

Levi Thomas	49 years of age	Black.
Rachel Thomas	49 .. ..	Korlato.
Ann Ross	48 .. ..	"
Philip Reed	42 .. ..	Black.
Letty Howard	33 .. ..	"
Willy her daughter	10 .. ..	"
Esther ..	3 months	"
Tom .. son	8 years of age	"
Alexander ..	6 1/2 .. ..	"
Jackson ..	5 .. ..	"
George	3 .. ..	Black Mills

May 2<sup>d</sup> 1862

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## Original Document

# Petition Submitted by Clark Mills

**PETITION.**

To the Commissioners under the act of Congress approved the 16th of April, 1862,  
entitled "An act for the release of certain persons held to service or labor in the  
District of Columbia."

Your Petitioner, Clark Mills of Washington County, D.C.  
by this his petition in writing, represents and states, that he is a person loyal to the  
United States, who, at the time of the passage of the said act of Congress, held a claim to  
service or labor against six male and five female  
persons of African descent the names of Lettie Howard and her children  
Tilly, Tom, Ellick, Jackson, George, and Emily; Levi Thomas,  
Rachel Thomas, Ann Robt, and Philip Reid,

for and during the life of said eleven persons,

and that by said act of Congress said eleven persons  
were discharged and freed of and from all claim of your petitioner to such service or labor;  
that at the time of said discharge said eleven persons  
were of the aged of \_\_\_\_\_

and of the personal description following: six - Lettie Howard, 33 years old, color  
black; short and thick set - healthy; her six children, Tilly, 10 years,  
Tom, 8 years, - Ellick, 6 1/2 years, - Jackson, 5 years, - George, 3 years, - and  
Emily, 3 months old, all black color, sound and healthy; Levi Thomas, 59 years old, black color, over six feet high, a large leg, rather  
stiff, but sound and in good health; Rachel Thomas, his wife, 49 years old,  
mulatto color, healthy, very large, weighs about 200 pounds; Ann Robt, 48  
years, mulatto color, about five feet seven inches high, rather thin, breaks, and  
in good health; and Philip Reid, aged 42 years, mulatto color, short  
in stature, in good health, not professing in appearance, but smart in  
mind, a good workman in a foundry, and has been employed in that  
capacity by the Government, at one dollar and twenty five cents  
per day. Now Petitioner is not aware that any of above profess any  
moral, mental, or bodily infirmities that impair their value, and  
does not believe that any such exist; except that mentioned in regard  
to the stiff leg of Levi Thomas.

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## Original Document

## Petition, page 2

That your petitioner acquired his claim to the aforesaid service or labor of said eleven persons, in manner following: (1) Lettie Howard and her child ago, for eight hundred Tilly were purchased from Peter Haveman some 8 or 9 years ago, for eight hundred dollars, and her five other children were born since. - Levi Thomas and his wife Rachel, he purchased in Baltimore about the same time, and paid nine hundred and fifty dollars for them: - Ann Rofs he acquired by his wife: - and Philip Reid, he purchased in Charleston, S. C. many years ago when he was quite a youth. He bought him because of his evident talent for the farming business in which your Petitioner was engaged, and paid twelve hundred dollars for him. - His papers having been burnt some years ago, he has no record evidence of his title.

That your petitioner's claim to the service or labor of said eleven persons was, at the time of said discharge therefrom, of the value of (see blow) dollars in money. (2)

(see preceding page.)

<u>Lettie Howard,</u>	<u>seven hundred dollars</u>	<u>\$700.00</u>
<u>Tilly Howard,</u>	<u>five hundred dollars</u>	<u>500.00</u>
<u>Tom Howard,</u>	<u>five hundred dollars</u>	<u>500.00</u>
<u>Ellick Howard,</u>	<u>four hundred dollars</u>	<u>400.00</u>
<u>Jackson Howard,</u>	<u>two hundred fifty dollars</u>	<u>250.00</u>
<u>George Howard,</u>	<u>one hundred fifty dollars</u>	<u>150.00</u>
<u>Emily Howard,</u>	<u>fifty dollars</u>	<u>50.00</u>
<u>Levi Thomas,</u>	<u>three hundred dollars</u>	<u>300.00</u>
<u>Rachel Thomas,</u>	<u>four hundred dollars</u>	<u>400.00</u>
<u>Ann Rofs,</u>	<u>five hundred dollars (\$500.-)</u>	<u>500.00</u>
<u>Philip Reid,</u>	<u>fifteen hundred dollars</u>	<u>1,500.00</u>
		<u>\$5,250.00</u>

Your petitioner hereby declares that he bears true and faithful allegiance to the Government of the United States, and that he has not borne arms against the United States in the present rebellion, nor in any way given aid or comfort thereto.

And your petitioner further states and alleges, that he has not brought said eleven persons into the District of Columbia since the passage of said act of Congress; and that, at the time of the passage thereof, said eleven persons were held to service or labor therein under and by virtue of your petitioner's claim to such service or labor.

Your petitioner further states and alleges, that his said claim to the service or labor of said eleven persons, does not originate in or by virtue of any transfer heretofore made by any person who has in any manner aided or sustained the present rebellion against the Government of the United States.

And your petitioner prays the said Commissioners to investigate and determine the validity of his said claim to the service or labor of said eleven persons herein above set forth; and if the same be found to be valid, that they appraise and apportion the value of said claim in money, and report the same to the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, in conformity to the provisions of said act of Congress.

(Signed by)

Clark Mills

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## Original Document

# Oath of Verification by Clark Mills

[Form of the Oath for the Verification of the Petition.]

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,  
Washington County, ss.

I, Clark Mills being duly sworn,  
do depose and say, that all the several matters and things which are set forth and stated in  
the foregoing petition, as of my own knowledge, are true in substance and in fact; and that  
all the several other matters and things therein set forth and stated, as from the information  
of others, I believe to be true in substance and in fact.

(Signed by) Clark Mills

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 18<sup>th</sup> day of June,  
A. D. 1862.

(Signed by) Edm. J. Brown,  
Notary Public.

Refer to Genl. Wm. Hickley, Jr.  
Alten Lodge, his  
neighbor, in this County.  
P. Henry H. Brown,  
Genl. Land Office.

Filed June 20 1862

Clark Mills -  
Claims 11 Slaves -  
Business Weekly Co. D. C.  
North East of Capital.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## Study the D.C. Emancipation Act Petitions



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Wood engraving of foundry owner Clark Mills

“An Act for the Release of certain Persons held to Service or Labor in the District of Columbia,” passed into law on April 16, 1862, and the Supplemental Act of July 12, 1862, were the first measures to free slaves in D.C. The National Archives in Washington, D.C., is the repository of the petitions and schedules of claimants to compensation. You are provided with reprints of the original petition submitted by D.C. slave owner Clark Mills.

These illustrate the petitions and schedules that slave owners were required to present to the appointed clerk in order to receive compensation for manumitting slaves that they held.

*Read the documents carefully. Below are some questions to guide your reading.*

1. Who was the Clerk of the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia when the D.C. Emancipation Act was passed?
2. What is the formal term for freeing slaves?
3. How many men, women and children was Clark Mills freeing?
4. Who was the oldest and who was the youngest of the slaves?
5. Slave owners were required to put a value on each slave. Whom does Clark value the most? Why is he so much more valuable than the other adults?
6. Select one of the adults. Use the information that is provided to write a descriptive paragraph to bring this person to life.

## D.C. Emancipation Act

<http://www.civilwardc.org>

**Civil War Washington**

Records of the National Archives digitized and published by the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured\\_documents/dc\\_emancipation\\_act/](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/dc_emancipation_act/)

**The District of Columbia Emancipation Act**

Entry point to National Archives online documents

<http://www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/2012/nr12-103.html>

**National Archives Shares Rarely-seen Slave Petitions from DC Emancipation Act**

“Inside the Vaults,” video with archivists Damani Davis and Robert Ellis and University of Nebraska-Lincoln scholar Kenneth Winkle

<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2010/spring/dcsavery.html>

**Slavery and Emancipation in the Nation's Capital: Using Federal Records to Explore the Lives of African American Ancestors**

The National Archives' Prologue Magazine, Spring 2010, Vol. 42, No. 1

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured\\_documents/dc\\_emancipation\\_act/supplemental\\_act.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/dc_emancipation_act/supplemental_act.html)

**Supplemental Act of July 12, 1862**

Slaves whose masters had not filed for compensation under the D.C. Emancipation Act, were allowed to claim emancipation for themselves.

<http://dc.gov/emancipationday>

**Ending Slavery in the Nation's Capital**

Booklet and “Enslavement to Emancipation” CD



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# Slave named Philip Reid helped create Statue of Freedom that sits atop Capitol

By Guy Gugliotta

• Originally Published April 11, 2012

Emancipation Day in the District of Columbia, in 1862, found Philip Reid working in a Bladensburg foundry, helping to cast a giant bronze statue destined to crown the massive new dome of the U.S. Capitol building.

He was a slave, owned by the foundry's owner, Clark Mills, and the statue he was working on was a symbol of freedom. He is the only slave known to have participated in the gigantic project, the so-called Capitol Extension that, between 1850 and 1865, added new Senate and House wings and a cast-iron dome. The addition would transform the too-small Capitol of antebellum Washington into the majestic seat of government we know today.

Construction of the Capitol Extension, topped with its symbol of freedom, was intimately and often ironically intertwined with the issue of slavery. When construction began at mid-century, then-Sen. Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, who had coaxed a \$100,000 appropriation through Congress to finance the project, owned nearly 100 slaves. The extension's architect, Thomas U. Walter, was a Southern sympathizer who once told a friend that slavery "was no sin." Army Corps of Engineers Capt. Montgomery C. Meigs, who built the extension, was anti-slavery, but never said so publicly.

These three men took turns leading the project for 15 years, and although there is no evidence that they hired anyone but free white men, it is possible that their contractors, who provided everything from teamsters to bricks and mortar, may have used slaves.

If so, nobody thought to remark upon it. It was not until the very end of the project, during the soul-sapping depths of the Civil War, that white Northerners began to realize that black people had names and stories to tell.

Today, the Architect of the Capitol Web site includes an article about the statue, currently shrouded by scaffolding, that details the work of Walter, Mills and sculptor Thomas Crawford. Reid is not mentioned.

## Designing the right figure

The events that brought Reid, a man in his 30s, to the Capitol began in 1854, when Walter designed a cast-iron dome to replace the ugly copper-sheathed fire hazard that preceded it. Walter showed his sketch to Meigs, who asked Crawford, then living in Rome, to design a statue to stand atop the dome.

Crawford mailed Meigs the photograph of a female figure that both he and Davis thought was perfect. Meigs asked Crawford to put the figure on a pedestal, so she would not stand directly atop the dome.

Crawford's second design was exquisite, Meigs wrote in his diary, an elegantly draped "light and beautiful figure." She was, however, completely different from the first Freedom. She had a pedestal, but she also wore a floppy felt "liberty cap," the symbol from classical antiquity of a manumitted slave.

Davis, overseeing the project as Secretary of War for President Franklin Pierce, did not like liberty caps. They had little meaning in the United States, he had told Meigs: "He says it is the sign of a freedman," Meigs wrote in his diary, "and that we were always free, not freedmen, not slaves just released."

If Meigs agreed with this bit of oblique sophistry, he left no record of it. Nor did he comment on what could become a far more incendiary problem: the irony of using a freed slave as the symbol of liberty in a nation that was holding 4 million people in bondage.

He sent the design back to Crawford, relaying Davis's views.

A third Freedom soon appeared in mid-1856. This one was 19½ feet tall — two feet taller than the others — and would weigh 7½ tons when cast in bronze. The statue, Crawford wrote, was "suggested by the costume of our Indian tribes," but it looked more like a Roman goddess with a



NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

**Although there is no evidence that anyone other than white men were hired to build the Capitol dome during the Capitol Extension, contractors may have used slave labor.**

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**Philip Reid, *continued***

fringed skirt. Instead of a liberty cap, she wore a crest of feathers and a bird's head, purporting to be that of an eagle. It looked like a rooster with its mouth open.

But Davis liked it.

**Ready to be cast**

Three years elapsed before the plaster model of the third Freedom, shipped in six pieces, arrived at Georgetown Harbor in mid-1859 after nearly being lost at sea. Meigs uncrated the model and put it together in the old House chamber, now known as Statuary Hall, so tourists could get a look at her while American foundries lobbied for the casting job.

Mills, owner of the Bladensburg factory, won. He was no amateur. His equestrian statue of Andrew Jackson in Lafayette Square was the first bronze statue cast in the United States. And Mills considered his slave, Reid, "smart in mind" and, as he later wrote, "a good workman in a foundry."

Casting began in June 1860, five months before Abraham Lincoln won the presidential election. There was little urgency at first. Contemporary accounts describe several instances when either the plaster model or the completed bronze Freedom had to be assembled or disassembled for transport.

The model was taken apart before it was sent in pieces to Bladensburg and the bronze pieces were bolted as each component was cast. The final product was then taken apart, and the individual pieces put into separate wagons, taken to the Capitol's East Front lawn and put back together for public display.

By that time — the summer of 1862 — Emancipation Day had already come and gone in the District. Whether Reid was freed by then is not known, for while the foundry was

just inside the District at Bladensburg, Mills — and Reid — could have lived in Maryland, still a slave state.

**Assembling the statue**

At some point during this long sequence of putting statues together and taking them apart, Reid stepped forward after an Italian worker, believing that he was the only person available who could do the job, refused to handle the statue unless his wages were increased. According to the *New York Tribune* of Dec. 10, 1863, Reid intervened, volunteering to assemble the statue when it was first bolted together for display on the Capitol lawn. This would have occurred in mid-1862.

Five years later, the writer S.D. Wyeth, in a multivolume memoir/tourist guide entitled *The Federal City; or, Ins and Abouts of Washington*, cited Mills's son as saying that Reid had played an earlier role, that he took the plaster model apart, presumably when it was being removed from the old House chamber and taken to the Mills foundry for casting. Reid used a block and tackle, and inserted a hook in the iron eye at the top of the statue; "the rope was gently strained repeatedly" until the statue began to pull apart, Wyeth said, and Reid and Mills were able to unbolt the individual pieces. This would have occurred in mid-1860, before the war started.

In either case, it is noteworthy that both the *Tribune* in 1863 and Wyeth five years later thought Reid's story important and interesting enough to relate to white readers. Before the war, references to individual black people, either free or slave, by anyone connected to the Capitol Extension project were virtually nonexistent.

But the attitudes of some had changed by Emancipation Day, and feelings ran white-hot. Walter, the onetime Southern apologist, had

**Philip Reid**

<http://www.aoc.gov/cc/capitol/Philip-Reid.cfm>

**Philip Reid and the Statue of Freedom**

The architect of the Capitol tells the story of Philip Reid and "enslaved laborers who were involved in almost every stage of construction."

[http://artandhistory.house.gov/art\\_artifacts/slave\\_labor\\_reportl.pdf](http://artandhistory.house.gov/art_artifacts/slave_labor_reportl.pdf)

**History of Slave Laborers in the Construction of the United States Capitol**

Architectural Historian William C. Allen documents the work of slave labor in constructing the Capitol. He concludes, "[it] is the Statue of Freedom on top of the dome that will forever be the most significant and visible object with a connection to slave labor."

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-1932612423655902829>

**Philip Reid and the Statue of Freedom**

This mini-documentary of the statue of Freedom atop the U.S. Capitol dome is told through the cartoon history Flashbacks by Patrick Reynolds.

<http://www.aoc.gov/cc/art/Slave-Labor-Commemorative-Marker.cfm>

**Slave Labor Commemorative Marker**

Architect of the Capitol article about the unveiling of a marker in Emancipation Hall at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center.

Walton, Eugene

*The Biography of Philip Reid: Historical Fiction*

Lulu, paperback and ebook (2008)

The story of how Philip Reid, a slave, came to supervise the bronze casting of The Statue of Freedom while enduring the disappointments of American slavery.

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**Philip Reid, *continued***

abandoned complacency, and when his second son wrote a letter informing him that he had joined the Confederate army, Walter's reply was swift and savage:

"Pandemonium has been let loose upon us, but Mr. Lincoln, and his constitutional advisers have met the hydra-headed monster, and fall it must," Walter wrote. "There can be no secession in this country. The traitors must be swept out with the broom of destruction." It would be better to make

the "South a desert than let a single traitor live to sow his pestiferous seeds abroad in the land."

On Dec. 2, 1863, the head of Freedom was hoisted 288 feet into the air and bolted into place. Thousands showed up to stand in the late autumn chill amid derelict chunks of cast-iron, marble boulders and piles of trash.

It is not known whether Philip Reid was among them. ■

*Gugliotta, a former Washington Post reporter, is the author of Freedom's Cap: The United States Capitol and the Coming of the Civil War.*

**Sculptor Thomas Crawford submitted designs beginning in 1855 for the Statue of Freedom to top the new Capitol dome. In his original concept (far right), the female figure wore a Phrygian cap. This was symbolic of the freed slave. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis wanted no references to slavery in public buildings. The compromise (right) was for Freedom to wear a helmet and eagle feathers.**



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## Research Using Reliable Sources

A journalist has many roles. In this assignment, you are a researcher, editor and writer. Guy Gugliotta in his April 11, 2012, article “Slave named Philip Reid helped create Statue of Freedom that sits atop Capitol” told of the men who were involved in the Capitol Extension and the creation of the statue atop the new dome. We focus on Philip Reid. Gugliotta wrote that Philip Reid was “a man in his 30s” in 1854. He also stated:

“By that time — the summer of 1862 — Emancipation Day had already come and gone in the District. Whether Reid was freed by then is not known, for while the foundry was just inside the District at Bladensburg, Mills — and Reid — could have lived in Maryland, still a slave state.”

### Be the Fact Checker

Read the Schedule and Petition of Clark Mills. What facts and data do you find in these documents that provide pertinent information about Philip Reid? Was the reporter accurate about Reid’s age? Do we have information to ascertain where Mills and his slaves lived in 1862?

### Be the Editor

You have read the information gained from research as well as the reporter’s text for publication. What questions would you ask the reporter? What part of the reporter’s paragraph do you think could be more accurate?

### Be the Writer

Rewrite the paragraph to be more accurate.

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### **ANSWERS.** *After Reading the D.C. Emancipation Act*

1. Answers will vary. At the heart of the Act is the ending of slavery of individuals of African descent in the District of Columbia.
2. Answers will vary. The act brought to a conclusion decades of agitation aimed at ending what antislavery advocates called “the national shame” of slavery in the nation’s capital. It provided for immediate emancipation, compensation to former owners who were loyal to the Union of up to \$300 for each freed slave, voluntary colonization of former slaves to locations outside the United States, and payments of up to \$100 for each person choosing emigration.
3. Conviction of committing a crime.
4. Individuals who support the Union; individuals who are against secession.
5. 90 days
6. Owners of slaves documented the existence of slaves, described them and estimated their value. Answers will include:
  - a. Name(s) of the slave(s) to be freed
  - b. Age of each, including children
  - c. Personal description of each
  - d. Circumstances under which each became property of the slave owner
  - e. Factual information about the value of the individual(s)
  - f. Allegiance to the United States government
  - g. Affirmation of not bearing arms against the U.S.
7. The three commissioners were to receive petitions, investigate and determine their validity. They were to appraise the amount of compensation to be paid for each manumission.
8. Three hundred dollars per person
9. The two additional conditions were:
  - a. Slaves had to be residing in the District at the time of the Act’s passage
  - b. Slaveholders who bore arms or aided rebels would not be compensated.
10. A full and final report of their proceedings and the total amount of compensation for each claim
11. Congress paid slave owners to give up their slaves. This was for loss of services as well as their property.
12. Set the time and place the commissioners would hold sessions to receive petitions and to hear claimants. Answers include: handle as a civil case; regardless of color, witnesses may be called; they may summon slave owners.
13. The clerk was to keep files and maintain a full record of the proceedings of the commissioners. Descendants of manumitted slaves have records of their ancestors and historians have documents to use to understand this period in D.C. and American history.
14. The commissioners were to be paid after they had completed their duties and filed their report. The Secretary of the Treasury was in charge of payment.
15. \$ 22,750,000.00
16. The Act was serious. Slaveholders who manumitted their slaves in order to receive compensation then try to re-enslave them would be punished. So would owners who brought in slaves from other states and claimed them as their own, residing in D.C. when this act was signed. They would be considered felons and imprisoned from five to 20 years.
17. Former slave owners (claimants) had to provide the name, age, sex and description of each person they want to continue in their service. These individuals will be free blacks.
18. The clerk of the commissioners and his successors were to provide a certificate of manumission under the seal of the court. The clerk was to be paid 25 cents for each certificate.
19. Some abolitionists wanted to relocate freed slaves to countries outside of the U.S. This provision appeases those who held these views.
20. When D.C. was established the slave codes of Maryland applied to D.C. Georgetown was the first settlement in the district and within D.C. boundaries.

### **Bonus Point**

As reprehensible as it is Congress paid slave owners to give up their slaves. Congress felt with this first emancipation, it had to be done to get compliance.

### **ANSWERS.** *Study the D.C. Emancipation Act Petitions*

1. John A. Smith
2. Manumission
3. Three women, two men and six children: Lettie Howard and her six children; Levi Thomas and his wife Rachel; Ann Ross; and Philip Reid
4. Levi and Rachel Thomas, both 49, were the oldest. Emily Howard at three months was the youngest.
5. Clark Mills placed \$1,500 value on Philip Reid. He was a skilled workman who had been employed by the Government to do foundry work.
6. Answers will vary.