

STATE OF NEW YORK

8284

2025-2026 Regular Sessions

IN ASSEMBLY

May 8, 2025

Introduced by M. of A. LUCAS -- read once and referred to the Committee on Governmental Operations

AN ACT to establish a New York State Freedmen's Bureau; and making an appropriation therefor

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "New York
2 State Freedmen's Bureau Act".

3 § 2. Legislative intent. The legislature makes the following findings
4 and declarations:

5 (a) Approximately 450,000+ Africans were trafficked and enslaved in
6 the United States and the colonies that became the United States from
7 1619 to 1865, inclusive. At the peak of slavery their descendants
8 numbered 4,000,000.

9 (b) The institution of slavery was constitutionally and statutorily
10 sanctioned by the United States from 1776 through 1865, inclusive.

11 (c) The chattel slavery that flourished in the United States consti-
12 tuted an immoral and inhumane deprivation of Africans' life, liberty,
13 citizenship rights, and cultural heritage and denied them the fruits of
14 their own labor.

15 (d) A preponderance of scholarly, legal, and community evidentiary
16 documentation, as well as popular culture markers, constitute the basis
17 for inquiry into the ongoing effects of the institution of slavery and
18 its legacy embodied in persistent systemic structures of discrimination
19 on living descendants of persons enslaved in the United States, American
20 Freedmen.

21 (e) Contrary to what many people believe, slavery was not just a
22 southern institution. Prior to the American Revolution, there were more
23 enslaved Africans in New York City than in any other city except Charle-
24 ston, South Carolina. During this period, slaves accounted for 20% of
25 the population of New York and approximately 40% of colonial New York
26 households owned slaves. In 1799 the New York State Legislature passed
27 "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery". This legislation was a
28 first step in the direction of emancipation but did not have an immedi-

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 ate effect on or affect all enslaved people. Rather, it provided for
2 gradual manumission. All children born to enslaved women after July 4,
3 1799, would be freed, but only after their most productive years: age 28
4 for men and age 25 for women. Enslaved persons already in servitude
5 before July 4, 1799, were reclassified as "indentured servants", but in
6 reality, remained enslaved for the duration of their lives. In 1817, the
7 Legislature enacted a statute that gave freedom to New York enslaved
8 people who had been born before July 4, 1799. This statute did not
9 become effective until July 4, 1827, however, despite these laws, there
10 were exceptions under which certain persons could still own slaves;
11 non-residents could enter New York with slaves for up to nine months,
12 and part-time residents were allowed to bring their slaves into the
13 state temporarily. The nine-month exception remained law until its
14 repeal in 1841 when the North was redefining itself as the "free" region
15 in advance of the Civil War.

16 (f) Following the abolition of slavery, the United States government
17 at the federal, state, and local levels continued to perpetuate,
18 condone, and often profit from practices that maintained brutalization
19 and disadvantage for descendants of persons enslaved in the United
20 States, American Freedmen, including but not limited to Black Codes,
21 sharecropping, convict leasing, Jim Crow laws, lynching, redlining,
22 unequal education, etc.

23 (g) As a result of the badges and incidents of slavery, Jim Crow, and
24 continued targeted discriminatory policy, the descendants of persons
25 enslaved in the United States, American Freedmen, continue to suffer
26 debilitating economic, educational, and health hardships.

27 § 3. Definition. For the purposes of this act, the term "American
28 Freedmen" shall mean those persons who have at least one ancestor that
29 was enslaved in the United States of America, who was emancipated in
30 1863 by way of the Emancipation Proclamation or in 1865 by way of the
31 13th Amendment to the Constitution, and have been despoiled their rights
32 as citizens due to the badges, incidents and vestiges of slavery.

33 § 4. Establishment, purpose, and duties of the bureau. (a) Establish-
34 ment. There is hereby established the New York State Freedmen's Bureau,
35 which may be referred to in this act as the "bureau".

36 (b) Duties. The bureau shall perform the following duties:

37 (i) Develop programs for American Freedmen which focus on community
38 life, education, and workforce development.

39 (ii) Connect American Freedmen with their lineage using methods
40 including, but not limited to, genealogical research.

41 (iii) Designate individuals who are American Freedmen as the popu-
42 lation that will be the focus and sole beneficiaries of the bureau's
43 programs.

44 (iv) Be the central administrator of programs recommended by the
45 bureau which become law.

46 § 5. Appropriation. The sum of fifty million dollars (\$50,000,000),
47 or so much thereof as may be necessary, is hereby appropriated to the
48 New York State Freedmen's Bureau from any moneys in the state treasury
49 in the general fund to the credit of the state purposes account not
50 otherwise appropriated for the purposes of carrying out the provisions
51 of this act. Such sum shall be payable on the audit and warrant of the
52 state comptroller on vouchers certified or approved by the director of
53 the New York State Freedmen's Bureau, or their duly designated represen-
54 tative in the manner provided by law.

55 § 6. This act shall take effect immediately.