

## **Teachers Guide for the Lemmon Slave Case Project**

The Lemmon Slave Case provides students of U.S. history a window into the legal challenges and moral conflicts over slavery before the Civil War. This case requires close examination of federal and state law. Most curriculums place a strong emphasis on the Dred Scott case, but the Lemmon Case shifts our focus to New York, and allows students to contemplate state's rights issues and the interpretation of the law through a lens of human equality.

In preparation for this project, students should have studied the U.S. Constitution and slavery in the context of westward expansion. Students should also spend time examining the institution and practice of slavery in southern and northern states. The New-York Historical Society has an excellent unit available for teachers called "Slavery in New York" that includes slave narratives and the history of slavery in the state from the Dutch, British, to U.S. colonial period. This unit can be found at:  
<http://www.slaveryinnewyork.org/education.htm>

***Below is a suggested sequence for working on the project with your class:***

### **Step 1: What is Research?**

Explain or review the types of primary and secondary sources that historians examine in their research. The first page of the unit packet contains space for students to begin thinking about what "historical research" includes. At the start of this project go over expectations for keeping track of all research materials. This section includes an explanation of the importance of keeping a research notebook or creating a digital folder to collect notes and stay organized while working on the project.

### **Step 2: Slavery and Abolition in New York State**

The timeline provided covers key dates, legislation, and relevant court cases for the Lemmon Slave Case. Students should be introduced to the historical context in which the case was heard. This should include a review of the places where slavery is referred to in the U.S. Constitution, as well as the Missouri Compromise, the abolition movement, and NY state laws.

### **Step 3: Developing Research Questions**

Read the overview of the case together with the class and ask them to generate questions to help guide their reading of the case and their research.

### **Step 4: Biography**

Focus on the information provided about Louis Napoleon, the African-American abolitionist who submitted the writ of habeas corpus to Judge Elijah Paine. This presents an opportunity to demonstrate strategies for uncovering the facts of his life and the case. As a class, you might find *3 Carlisle Street* on a current map or a map from the mid-nineteenth century of New York City, where the boarding house was located. Or, you might research abolitionist organizations based in NYC at the time. This modeling can help students see

how to move from research questions to basic internet searches. This step might also include researching other people involved in the case.

### **Step 5: Reading *The People of the State of New York, ex relatione Louis Napoleon v. Jonathan Lemmon (1852)***

The Case is divided into sections. Each section can be read together in class or assigned for homework with guiding questions. Instruct students to take notes in the margins to help focus them in their reading of the case (margin notes should include a summary of key points of argument, definitions of new vocabulary words, and questions).

### **Step 6: Using Historical Newspaper Databases**

Before students can do independent research, provide instruction on coming up with search terms. Use a database of historical newspapers covering the east coast during the 1850s to find newspaper articles covering the Lemmon Slave Case. Your school or public library may have subscriptions to a variety of appropriate databases. Additionally, a subscription to the *New York Times* will provide access to their archive and yield ample results. Once students have found articles they should take notes and summarize the articles for inclusion later into their research papers.

### **Step 7: Developing Questions for Student Papers**

Ask students to review the legal arguments presented in the case, along with the information and evidence they collected from their newspaper articles. Collaboratively ask students to consider what aspect of this case is most interesting to them. From there, they might consider what questions they can answer using the information and evidence available to them. After individual students or groups of students have generated questions, evaluate them together and choose either one question you would like the entire class to answer in their papers or provide students a choice of a few questions. Below are examples of student questions developed:

- *Compare and contrast the legal argument used by the lawyers representing the Lemmons and their eight slaves.*
- *How did the Lemmon Slave Case and the Dred Scott Decision help set the stage to the Civil War?*
- *What role did Louis Napoleon and NY based anti-slavery organizations play in slave cases like the Lemmons?*
- *On what legal grounds were the eight slaves of the Lemmon Slave Case eventually given freedom?*
- *Somerset v Stewart was an important legal precedent used in the Lemmon Slave Case. How was the concept of common law and positive law used in the case?*

### **Step 8: The Paper**

The Handout detailing the guidelines for this paper provides basic instructions and expectations. There is also an argument building worksheet that students can use to begin developing an argument and select evidence to support their argument. You may want to break the paper up into smaller assignments and have students: develop a thesis statement, create an outline, develop a rough draft, peer workshop their drafts, and then turn in a finished project.