

1702. An Act for Regulating Slaves

Source: The Colonial Laws of New York from the Year 1664 to the Revolution, v. 1., pp. 519-521, in E.B. O'Callaghan, ed. (1851). *The Documentary History of the State of New-York*. Albany, NY:Charles Van Benthysen.

New York's first comprehensive slave code was adopted in 1702. It equated slave status with being African. Native Americans could no longer be enslaved. Indentured servitude was limited to Whites only. Masters were granted almost unlimited power to coerce and punish slaves. Source: Burrows, E. and Wallace, M. (1999). *Gotham, A History of New York City to 1898*. NY: Oxford, 146.

AN ACT FOR REGULATING OF SLAVES

IT ENACTED BY HIS EXCELL'CY THE GOVERNOUR AND COUNCILL AND REPRESENTATIVES convened in General Assembly, and by authority of the same, That no Person or Persons hereafter throughout this Province, do presume to Trade with any slave either in buying or selling, without leave and Consent of the Master or Mistress, on penalty of forfeiting Treble the value of the thing traded for, and for the sum of five pounds Current money of New-York, to the Master or Mistress of such slave. . . .

AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED by the authority aforesaid, That hereafter it shall and may be lawful for any Master or Mistress of slaves to punish their slaves for their Crimes and offences at Discretion, not exceeding to life or Member. And for as much as the Number of slaves in the City of New-York and Albany, and also in other Towns within this Province, doth daily increase, and that they have been found oftentimes guilty of Confederating together in running away, or other ill practices, Be it therefore Enacted by the authority aforesaid, That it shall not hereafter be lawful for above three Slaves to meet together at any other time, nor at any other place, then when it shall happen they meet in some servile employment for their Master's or Mistress's profit, and by their Master or Mistress consent, upon penalty of being whipt upon the naked back, at discretion of any Justice of the peace, not exceeding forty Lashes. . . .

AND WHEREAS SLAVES ARE THE PROPERTY OF CHRISTIANS, and cannot without great loss or detriment to their Masters or Mistress, be subjected in all Cases criminal, to the strict Rules of the Laws of England, Be it Enacted by the Authority aforesaid, That hereafter ... no slave shall be allowed good evidence in any matter, Cause or thing whatsoever, excepting in Cases of Plotting or Confederacy amongst themselves, either to run away, kill or destroy their Master or Mistress, or burning of houses, or barns or barracks of Corn, or the killing of their Master's or Mistress's Cattle and that against one another, in which Case the Evidence of one slave shall be allowed good against another slave.

November 27, 1702