

Indentured Servant Agreement, 1742

Introduction

Colonial Americans engaged in many forms of unfree labor, with great numbers of youths moving away from their families to become servants or apprentices. The terms of their service were spelled out in contracts called indentures, legal agreements that were entered into by the child's parent(s) and the child's new master. These agreements varied, but certain terms were standardized enough that pre-printed forms were often used.

In November 1742, John Reid Jr. of New Jersey bound himself to Robert Livingston Jr., a member of a prominent New York family, to learn the merchant trade. Reid was to receive "sufficient meat Drink and Lodging" for five years and "be taught the Art and Mystery of a merchant." In exchange, he and his father pledged that Reid would "gladly every where obey" Livingston's "lawfull Commands" and "do no damage to his said Master," and "not Contract Matrimony" or "absent himself Day nor Night from his said Masters Service without his Leave." Servants who did leave without permission of their master were considered runaways and their master placed advertisement in newspapers. These ads are very similar to runaway slave advertisements.

Benjamin Franklin, who was treated harshly by his much-older brother when he was indentured to him, later wrote in his autobiography that his brother's treatment "might be a means of impressing me with that aversion to arbitrary power that has stuck to me through my whole life." Colonists' familiarity with servitude probably contributed to their suspicions of power and their fear that America would be subjected to Britain's arbitrary rule and autocratic trade and tax policies.

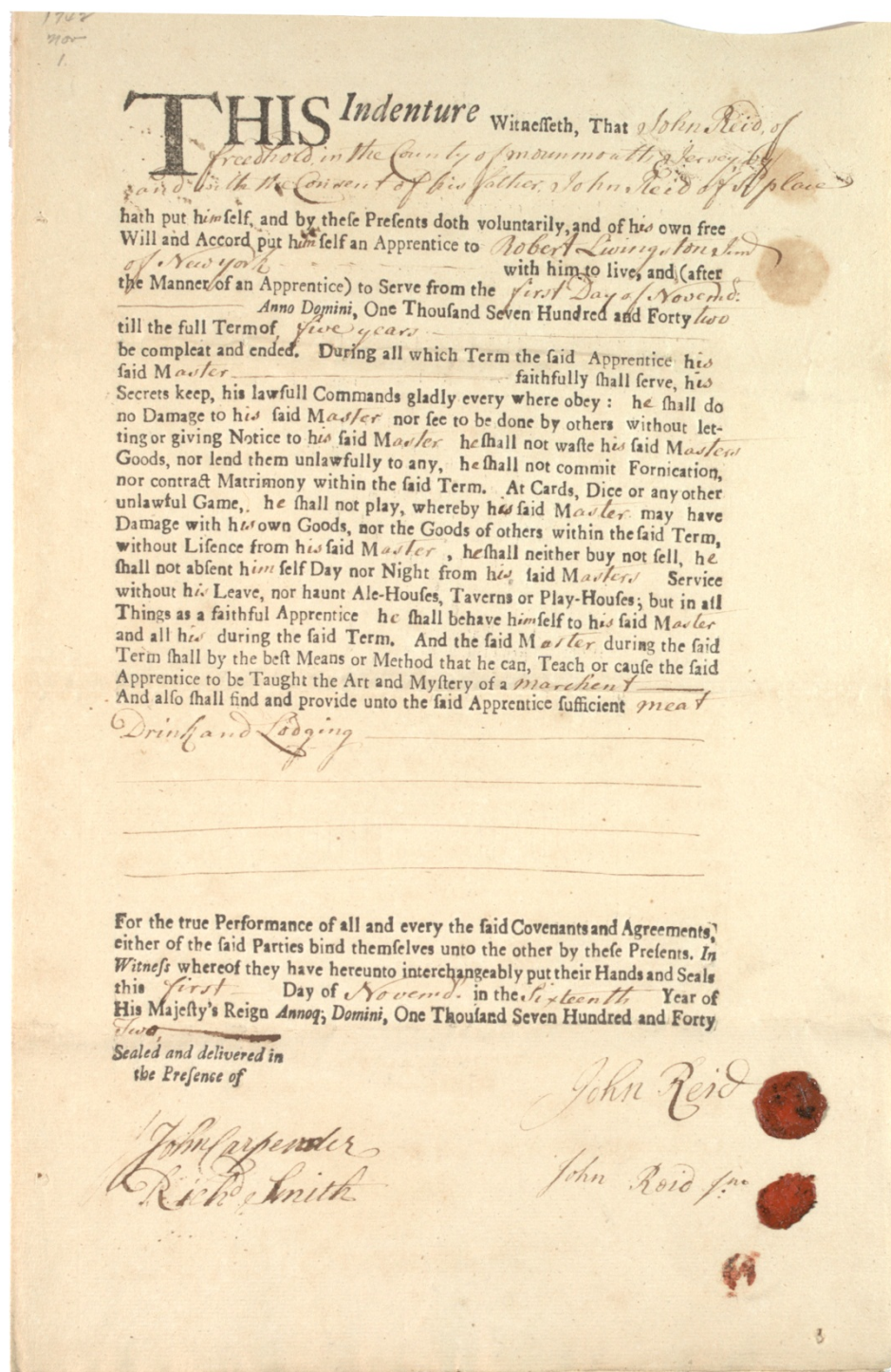
Questions for Discussion

Read the document and the document introduction and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer these questions.

1. In what way was the experience of an indentured servant similar to or different from the situation of an enslaved person?
2. Place yourself in the position of the son, his father, and the master in this agreement. Explain the advantages and disadvantages to each under the terms of the agreement.
3. How can we explain the fact that in many colonies indentured servitude and slavery existed at the same time?

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Image



Indenture of apprenticeship with Robert Livingston, Jr. November 1, 1742 (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC03107.02668)

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<p>RAN away from the Subscriber, living at <i>Benedict</i>, on the 2d of <i>February</i> last, an hired <i>Irish</i> Servant Man, named <i>Patrick Smith</i>, about 5 Feet 4 Inches high, and pretty thick set. He had on when he went away, a black Everlasting Waistcoat, a light Fustian Jacket with white Metal Buttons, a grey Sagathy Coat with blue Lining, a Pair of blue Half-thick Breeches, and a cut Grizzel Wig.</p> <p>Whoever shall secure the said <i>Patrick Smith</i>, or convey him to the Subscriber, shall receive Ten Shillings, besides what the Law allows. paid by <i>Basil Brooke.</i></p>	<p>RAN away on the 13th of <i>April</i> last, from the Subscriber, living near <i>Bladenburg</i>, in <i>Prince George's</i> County, a Servant Man, named <i>Nathanael Sherlard</i> (but may probably change his Name), by Trade a Carpenter and Joiner, a well set, clean limb'd Man, about 5 Feet 10 Inches high, of a swarthy Complexion, has black Eyes, and a sly Look. He has taken many Cloaths with him, both Men and Womens, some new Linen and Money, a Blanket and coarse Sheet, also some Carpenters and Joiners Tools, such as Chizzels, Saws, Broad Axe, a Smoothing Plane, &c. and a large Man's Saddle and Bridle; but as no Horse is missing, it is supposed he had some Companion to help him to one.</p> <p>Whoever apprehends the said Servant, and brings him to the Subscriber, shall receive Four Pistoles Reward, if taken within Forty Miles from Home; if taken at a greater Distance, Five Pistoles Reward; and reasonable Charges, paid by <i>Andrew Beall.</i></p>
<p>RAN away, on the 21st of <i>April</i>, from the Subscriber, living in the Borough of <i>Lancaster</i>, an Apprentice Lad, named <i>William Kenley</i>, about 15 Years of Age, of a fresh Complexion, and has brown Hair: Had on when he went away, a Felt Hat, half worn Bearskin Coat, green Napt Jacket, Buckskin Breeches, white Shirt, Worsted Stockings, and good Shoes. Whoever takes up and secures said Apprentice, so that his Master may have him again, shall have Forty Shillings Reward, and reasonable Charges, paid by <i>William Dunlap.</i></p> <p><i>N. B.</i> It is supposed he is sent off by his Father <i>Daniel Kenley</i>, Schoolmaster in <i>Lancaster</i>, to his Grandfather, ——— <i>Wells</i>, in <i>Baltimore</i> County, <i>Maryland</i>, and is harbour'd by him, or some one of that Family.</p>	<p><i>April 24, 1755.</i></p> <p>NOTICE is hereby given to the Inhabitants of <i>Anne Arundel</i> County, that (as very little of the County Tax has this Year been paid in Money) they are requested to pay off their Dues by the Tenth of <i>June</i> (the Time affix'd by Law) in Tobacco, that the Subscriber may be enabled to pay the Officers and Clergy, in the limited Time, their respective Demands. And those who do not settle agreeable to Law will oblige</p>

Advertisements for runaway indentured servants, May 22, 1755 (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC08719)

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Transcript

Indenture of apprenticeship with Robert Livingston, Jr. November 1, 1742 (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC03107.02668)

THIS *Indenture* Witnesseth, that John Reid of freedhold in the County of Monnmouth Jersey by and with the Consent of his father John Riad of S^d place hath put himself, and by these Presents doth voluntarily, and of his own free Will and Accord put himself an Apprentice to Robert Livingston Jun of New York with him to live, and (after the Manner of an Apprentice) to Serve from the first Day of Novemb^r: *Anno Domini*, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Forty two till the full Term of five years be compleat and ended. During all which Term the said Apprentice his said Master faithfully shall serve, his Secrets keep, his lawfull Commands gladly every where obey: he shall do no Damage to His said Master nor see to be done by others without letting or giving Notice to his said master he shall not waste his said Masters Goods, nor lend them unlawfully to any, he shall not commit Fornication, nor contract Matrimony within the said Term. At Cards, Dice or any other unlawful Game, he shall not play, whereby his said Master may have Damage with his own Goods, nor the Goods of others within the said Term, without Lisence [*sic*] from his said Master, he shall neither buy not [*sic*] sell, he shall not absent himself Day nor Night from his said Masters Service without his Leave, nor haunt Ale-Houses, Taverns or Play-Houses; but in all Things as a faithful Apprentice he shall behave himself to his said Master and all his during the said Term. And the said Master during the said Term shall by the best Means or Method that he can, Teach or cause the said Apprentice to be Taught the Art and Mystery of a Marchent [*sic*] And also shall find an provide unto the said Apprentice sufficient meat Drink and Lodging

For the true Perfomance of all and every the said Covenants and Agreements, either of the said Parties bind themselves unto the other by these Presents. *In Witness* whereof they have hereunto interchangeably put their Hands and Seals this first Day of Novemb^r. in the Sixteenth Year of His Majesty's Reign *Annoq*; [*sic*] *Domini*, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Forty Two,

*Sealed and delivered in
the Presence of*

John Reid

John Carpenter
Rich^d Smith

John Reid J^{nr}: