**Freedom Seeker Biography Assignment**

The assignment is to write a **1,000 word essay** telling the reader as much as possible about a person who tried to escape from slavery.

When enslaved people escaped their enslavers often published newspaper advertisements describing the person or persons who had escaped and offering rewards for their capture and return. These advertisements, and other primary sources, can be used to research and write about the freedom seekers (the people who escaped from slavery). You must select an advertisement and then analyze it and do additional research so that you can complete this assignment.

It is important to remember that the advertisement will usually reflect the beliefs and attitudes of the enslaver, and so the escapee is often described and defined in racist terms that dehumanize him or her. The goal of this assignment is to center the freedom seeker *as a person* rather than as an enslaved individual. Remember, too, that it is unlikely that you will be able to write a conventional biographical essay that covers birth, marriage, death etc. To that end, here are some questions you should ask yourself to help you begin to outline your chosen subject’s life:

1. What was the enslaved person’s name (according to the ad)? Is this the only name s/he was known by? What can you infer about the person from their name?
2. From where did the enslaved person escape? What might this location reveal?
3. How is the enslaved person described? What information does this provide about her/his person?
4. Is there anything in the advertisement that either explicitly states, or hints, at a skill, a profession, a kind of work performed by the enslaved person?
5. What, if any, reason does the advertisement give for the enslaved person running away? If there is no reason, can one be inferred from other information given in the ad?
6. Did the freedom seeker take anything with her/him? If so, how might these goods have aided in her/his escape? What do they reveal about this person and their bid for freedom?

Once you have begun to answer the questions above, you will want to identify areas for further research. Doing so will help you find the secondary sources (or perhaps even some primary sources) to flesh out your analysis.

For example, if your runaway is a young boy with a West African name, you might want to read an article about names and naming practices. If you are reading about a girl or woman who clearly did domestic household work, then you would want to figure out what that looked like. If there is a skillset or profession hinted at, you might want to investigate what that work entailed. If someone was suspected of running to the docks, then you might want to learn about maritime networks and Black sailors.

**Format**

Your essay should be written in a reasonable 12-point font, be double-spaced, and include page numbers. You should footnote the scholarly sources you use. It should be about 1,000 words in length (not including footnotes).