

Re. 16. Apr.

Public 50.

Thirty-seventh Congress of the United States of America;

At the second Session,

Began and held at the city of Washington, on Monday, the second day of December, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-one

AN ACT

For the release of certain persons held to service or labor in the District of Columbia.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That all persons held to service or labor within the District of Columbia, by reason of African descent, are hereby discharged and freed of and from all claim to such service or labor, and from and after the passage of this act neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except for crime, whereof the party shall be duly convicted, shall hereafter exist in said District. Sec. 2. And be it further enacted, that all persons loyal to the United States holding claims to service or labor against persons discharged therefrom by this act may, within ninety days from the passage thereof, but not thereafter, present to the Commissioners hereinafter mentioned their respective statements or petitions in writing, verified by oath or affirmation, setting forth the names, ages, and personal description of such persons, the manner in which said petitioners acquired such claim, and any facts touching the validity thereof, and receding his allegiance to the government of the United States; and that he has not borne arms against the United States during the present rebellion, nor in any way given aid or comfort thereto: Provided, that the oath of the party to the petition shall not be evidence of the facts therein stated. Sec. 3. And be it further enacted, that the President of the United States, with the advice and consent of the Senate, shall appoint three commissioners, residents of the District of Columbia, any two of whom shall have power to act, who shall receive the petitions above mentioned, and who shall investigate and determine the validity and value of the claims therein presented, as aforesaid, and apportion, under the proviso hereto annexed, the value in money of the several claims by them found to be valid: Provided, however, that the entire sum so appraised and apportioned shall not exceed in the aggregate an amount equal to three hundred dollars for each person shown to have been so held by lawful claim.