

JOHN BROWN OF PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND



**“NARRATIVE HISTORY” AMOUNTS TO FABULATION,
THE REAL STUFF BEING MERE CHRONOLOGY**



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

1722

December 21, Friday (Old Style): Captain [James Brown](#) and Hope Power, the daughter of Nicholas and Mercy Tillinghast Power, were wed in [Providence, Rhode Island](#). The couple would have a number of sons who would become famous wealthy merchants in Providence, and founders and patrons of [Brown University](#):

- On February 12, 1724, a son named [James Brown](#) who would not marry and who would die at York, Virginia on February 15, 1750
- On July 28, 1729, a son named [Nicholas Brown](#), who would marry a first wife Rhoda Jenks on May 2, 1762 and then a second wife Avis Binney on September 9, 1785, who would have a son [Nicholas Brown, Jr.](#) who would be a benefactor of [Brown University](#) and a famous wealthy merchant in [Providence](#), and who would die in 1791
- In 1731, a daughter named Mary Brown who would marry a John Vanderlight
- On December 3, 1733, a son named Joseph Brown who would marry Elizabeth Power on September 30, 1759, who was a patriot in the Revolution and served in both [Providence](#) town and Rhode Island state offices, and would die on December 3, 1785
- On January 27, 1736, a son named [John Brown](#), who would marry Sarah Smith on November 27, 1760, who would be a famous wealthy merchant and [slavetrader](#) in [Providence](#), and benefactor of [Brown University](#), and would die in 1803
- On September 12, 1738, a son named [Moses Brown](#) (who would marry a first time on January 1, 1764 to his first cousin Anna Brown and then, after Anna's death in about 1773, a second time on March 4, 1779 to Friend Mary Olney, and then a third time on May 2, 1799 to Phebe Lockwood), who would be a famous wealthy merchant in [Providence](#) and a benefactor of the Rhode Island Friends Quarterly Meeting School (now for some reason known as the [Moses Brown School](#)), and would die in 1836.¹

Here is what has been said of the influence of this Friend, in Hugh Barbour's and J. William Frost's THE QUAKERS (NY: Greenwood Press, 1988, pages 298-9):

[Moses Brown](#), born into a prominent prosperous [Baptist](#) family, served an apprenticeship with his uncle Obadiah Brown in order to learn mercantile practices. Later he joined with his three elder brothers in Nicholas Brown and Co., a firm engaged in iron manufacture, the West Indies trade, the manufacture and sale of spermacetti candles, and -on one occasion- the slave trade. Moses, who married his first cousin Anna, daughter of Obadiah Brown, became wealthy. In the 1760s he became active in civic improvements, politics, agricultural reform, and education - notably the creation of the College of Rhode Island [[Brown University](#)]. The death of Anna in 1773 caused Moses Brown to reconsider his priorities. He attempted (unsuccessfully) to withdraw from business, traveled with itinerant Quaker ministers in New England, freed his own [slaves](#), and became an ardent abolitionist and defender of free blacks. In 1774 he requested membership in the [Smithfield](#) Monthly Meeting. He soon became a leader of the [Rhode Island Friends](#), serving as elder from 1783 to 1836 and treasurer of the Meeting for Sufferings after 1776.

1. This Moses (1738-1836) is not to be confused with Moses (1793-1879) or Moses (1829-1883), nor for that matter is he to be confused with a non-Quaker Moses Brown who was a merchant in Newburyport, Massachusetts.



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Before the Revolution, Brown attempted to broaden the antislavery campaign beyond Friends. In 1776 he organized a Quaker relief effort to help those New Englanders suffering the effects of the British blockade. He opposed independence and sought for a neutral course during the war. He had misgivings about the official Quaker stance of not using paper money and not paying mixed taxes. Concerned with what he saw as a lack of educational opportunity for Friends, Brown helped organize a [Yearly Meeting](#) school that lasted from 1784 to 1788; twenty years later in [Providence](#) he revived this boarding school, which today is called the [Moses Brown School](#).

Brown's charitable and humanistic activities continued after the peace. He led the effort of Friends and other Rhode Islanders to end the slave trade and abolish slavery. Brown worked with non-Quakers in supporting the College of Rhode Island, the American Bible Society, and the Rhode Island Peace Society. Although his lack of formal education left him reticent about publishing, he read widely and corresponded on medical and scientific subjects.

Seeing the distress in [Rhode Island](#) after the Revolution, Brown sought to increase economic opportunity by helping to found and serve as a director of the first bank in Rhode Island. His initial qualms about the United States [Constitution](#) were overcome by the Bill of Rights, and he mobilized Quakers to support Rhode Island's ratification. He became an expert on cloth manufacture and sponsored [Samuel Slater](#)'s activities in developing the American textile industry.

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NOBODY COULD GUESS WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT





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1727

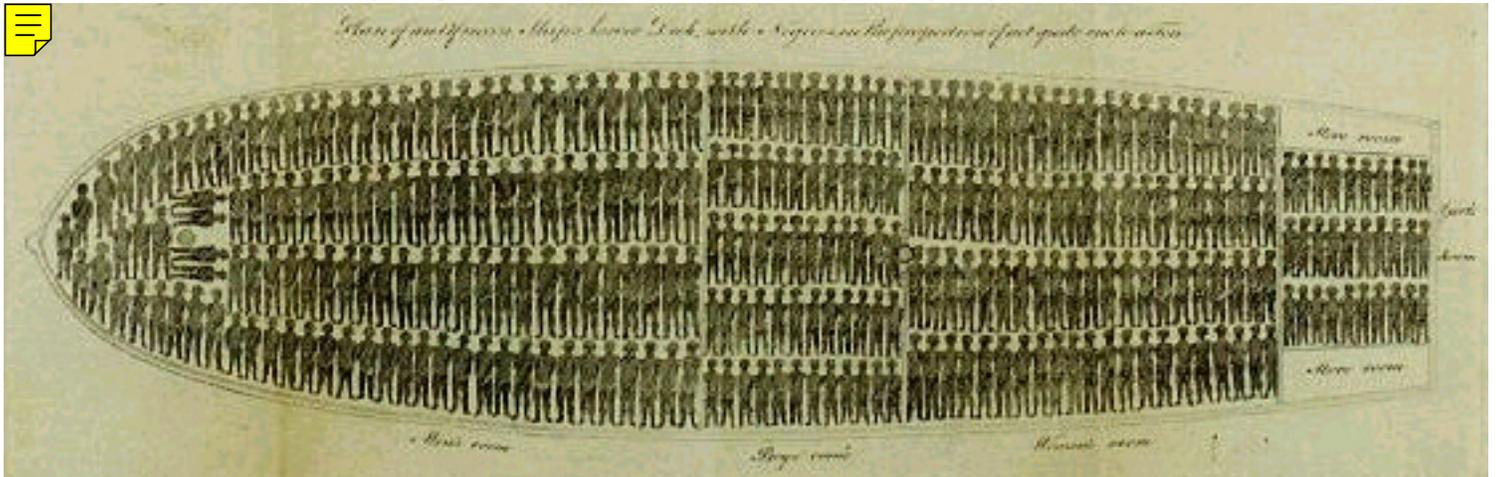
Captain [James Brown](#) voyaged from [Rhode Island](#) to Martinique.

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1736

In Rhode Island harbors alone, during this year alone, it has been estimated by Alexander Boyd Hawes, some 10 vessels were being fitted out for the international slave trade. If an average cargo of slaves was 109—as we have estimated on the basis of a number of known cargos— then a total of something like 1,090 souls would have been being transported over the dreadful Middle Passage during this year in Rhode Island bottoms alone.



Examples would include the schooner *Haddock*, under Captain Aldridge, James Brown's sloop *Mary*, under Captain John Godfrey, the brigantine *Marigold*, under Captain T.T. Taylor, and an unidentified vessel under

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Captain John Cahoon.



According to Appendix C. to W.E. Burghardt Du Bois's THE SUPPRESSION OF THE AFRICAN SLAVE-TRADE TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 1638-1870, there was also a [negrero](#) the name of which we do not know, sailing out of [Rhode Island](#) in October under Captain John Griffen (AMERICAN HISTORICAL RECORD, I. 312).

DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION? GOOD.



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Thomas Harding, a blacksmith of [Providence](#), took a contract to forge handcuffs² for use aboard the sloop *Mary*, bound for the coast of Guinea.

[RHODE ISLAND](#)



2. “35 pare of hand coofs”. Well, children, have you ever heard of divine Providence? If you provide yourself with a plenty of hand coofs, God will provide you with a plenty of black slaves. It was apparently a rather ordinary practice to use iron handcuffs to subdue an unruly person of color. According to the journal of [Friend Thomas B. Hazard](#) or Hafsard or Hasard of [Kingstown, Rhode Island](#), also known as “Nailer Tom,” at one point he was asked to fashion a pair of handcuffs with which to confine a crazy negress named Patience.

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Here is the coast of Guinea, from a map published in London some six years earlier:³ Captain James TRIANGULAR TRADE



the father of the five young Brown brothers plus a daughter, injured himself by attempting too much during a weight-lifting contest at a fair. He supposed he had ruptured his spleen, and gave permission that his body be opened after his death to verify this.

3. For this and other such maps: <http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/search.html>



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January 27, Tuesday (1735, Old Style): [John Brown](#) was born. His father [James Brown](#) was a [Providence, Rhode Island](#) shipowner, who owned four black [slaves](#) and participated in the [international slave trade](#), which is to say, he was willing to make money out of the misery of other human beings. John would be raised as a [Baptist](#) and as an adult, would like his father before him participate in the [international slave trade](#).



And, he would loudly and indignantly claim that this was all right: good for father, good for son, end of story. (Evidently being baptized means never needing to admit that you're one sorry son of a bitch.)

**WHAT I'M WRITING IS TRUE BUT NEVER MIND
YOU CAN ALWAYS LIE TO YOURSELF**



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April/May: At [Providence](#), [Rhode Island](#), [James Brown](#) was preparing the negrero sloop *Mary* for a voyage to obtain 100 new [slaves](#) along the coast of Africa.

THE TRAFFIC IN MAN-BODY

CHANGE IS ETERNITY, STASIS A FIGMENT



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1737

May: The negrero sloop *Mary* had obtained, in round numbers, about 100 Africans. It had brought these people to the Caribbean and exchanged most of them for things that New England very much needed, such as guns and gunpowder, as well as cordage and coffee and salt, etc. It had brought all the way back to [Providence](#), [Rhode Island](#) with it, however, three [slaves](#) who would be vended locally by Captain [James Brown](#).

THE TRAFFIC IN MAN-BODY

**LIFE IS LIVED FORWARD BUT UNDERSTOOD BACKWARD?
— NO, THAT’S GIVING TOO MUCH TO THE HISTORIAN’S STORIES.
LIFE ISN’T TO BE UNDERSTOOD EITHER FORWARD OR BACKWARD.**



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1739

A well-known captain, [James Brown](#), had begun a trading business in 1723 and soon married the daughter of an important [Rhode Island](#) merchant, Hope Power. James died prematurely in this year because he had attempted to lift too much at a weight-lifting contest at a local fair (suspecting that what had happened was that he had ruptured his spleen, he left instructions for his body to be opened and examined after death). In the inventory which was made of his estate, we find listed alongside line items for sundry swine and pairs of oxen a line item for “4 Negros” worth collectively £300 — with no indication of their age or gender or origin, or even their names. (We may suppose that these four individuals would, at the age of Moses Brown’s majority, be transferred to be his property, and would then be among the slaves whom Friend Moses would manumit, but we do not have evidence for such an identification.) His brother Obadiah Brown who had captained the negrero sloop *Mary* on its venture in the [international slave trade](#) would bring James’s sons [Nicholas Brown](#), Joseph Brown, and [John Brown](#) into the business at their shop on Towne Street (South Main Street, [Providence](#)). Later a 4th brother, [Moses Brown](#), at this point still an infant (“Nick and Josie, John and Mosie”), would join them. By 1796 they would have taken a partner, Thomas Poynton Ives.

1739. A public ferry was established where Washington bridge now is, at India Point.

THE FUTURE IS MOST READILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT





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1743

January (1742, Old Style): In [Providence](#), [Rhode Island](#), [John Brown](#), not yet seven years of age and not yet known as “Old Thunder,” achieved his realization of the nature of human society, one that would propel him throughout the remainder of his silly life. Here it is, your moment of zen. As he would express this realization during his adult years in a letter to a son: “Before I was seven years old I knew what property was and consequently what a despicable figure I myself and my children after me would cut without a share thereof.” This is why, for the duration of his life, this “Old Thunder” dude would hold it to be of supreme importance to buy and sell the bodies of other human beings. He had become, irrevocably, a capitalist.

SLAVERY

THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

THE FUTURE CAN BE EASILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT





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1749

[John Brown](#) of [Providence, Rhode Island](#) was twelve years of age. In the front of a preserved cipher book from his schooling, we can see that he had limned for himself a self-instruction: "John Brown the Cleverest boy in Providence Town."⁴

4. From his life details, and from other remarks this man made about himself which have been preserved, we can be quite sure of what it was that he regarded as cleverness. For this proto-capitalist schmuck who was approximately as rotund (very rotund) as he was short (very short), the totality of cleverness consisted in always keeping in the forefront of one's mind the fact that the key ingredient of every situation is: **who owns what**.



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1749. There were 31 licensed Tavern-keepers.

Table of Altitudes



Yoda	2' 0 "
Lavinia Warren	2' 8 "
Tom Thumb, Jr.	3' 4 "
Lucy (Australopithecus Afarensis)	3' 8 "
Hervé Villechaize ("Fantasy Island")	3' 11"
Charles Proteus Steinmetz	4' 0 "
Mary Moody Emerson per FBS (1)	4' 3 "
Alexander Pope	4' 6 "
Benjamin Lay	4' 7 "
Dr. Ruth Westheimer	4' 7 "
Gary Coleman ("Arnold Jackson")	4' 8 "
Edith Piaf	4' 8 "
Queen Victoria with osteoporosis	4' 8 "
Linda Hunt	4' 9 "
Queen Victoria as adult	4' 10 "
Mother Teresa	4' 10 "
Margaret Mitchell	4' 10 "
length of newer military musket	4' 10"
Charlotte Brontë	4' 10-11"
Tammy Faye Bakker	4' 11"
Soviet gymnast Olga Korbut	4' 11"
jockey Willie Shoemaker	4' 11"
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec	4' 11"
Joan of Arc	4' 11"
Bonnie Parker of "Bonnie & Clyde"	4' 11"
Harriet Beecher Stowe	4' 11"
Laura Ingalls Wilder	4' 11"
a rather tall adult Pygmy male	4' 11"
Gloria Swanson	4' 11"1/2
Clara Barton	5' 0 "
Isambard Kingdom Brunel	5' 0 "
Andrew Carnegie	5' 0 "
Thomas de Quincey	5' 0 "
Stephen A. Douglas	5' 0 "
Danny DeVito	5' 0 "





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Immanuel Kant	5' 0 "
William Wilberforce	5' 0 "
Dollie Parton	5' 0 "
Mae West	5' 0 "
Pia Zadora	5' 0 "
Deng Xiaoping	5' 0 "
Dred Scott	5' 0 " (±)
Captain William Bligh of HMS <i>Bounty</i>	5' 0 " (±)
Harriet Tubman	5' 0 " (±)
Mary Moody Emerson per FBS (2)	5' 0 " (±)
John Brown of Providence, Rhode Island	5' 0 " (+)
John Keats	5' 3/4 "
Debbie Reynolds (Carrie Fisher's mother)	5' 1 "
Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher)	5' 1 "
Bette Midler	5' 1 "
Dudley Moore	5' 2 "
Paul Simon (of Simon & Garfunkel)	5' 2 "
Honore de Balzac	5' 2 "
Sally Field	5' 2 "
Jemmy Button	5' 2 "
Margaret Mead	5' 2 "
R. Buckminster "Bucky" Fuller	5' 2 "
Yuri Gagarin the astronaut	5' 2 "
William Walker	5' 2 "
Horatio Alger, Jr.	5' 2 "
length of older military musket	5' 2 "
the artist formerly known as Prince	5' 2 1/2 "
typical female of Thoreau's period	5' 2 1/2 "
Francis of Assisi	5' 3 "
Voltaire	5' 3 "
Mohandas Gandhi	5' 3 "
Sammy Davis, Jr.	5' 3 "
Kahlil Gibran	5' 3 "
Friend Daniel Ricketson	5' 3 "
The Reverend Gilbert White	5' 3 "
Nikita Khrushchev	5' 3 "
Sammy Davis, Jr.	5' 3 "
Truman Capote	5' 3 "





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	Kim Jong Il (North Korea)	5' 3 "
	Stephen A. "Little Giant" Douglas	5' 4 "
	Francisco Franco	5' 4 "
	President James Madison	5' 4 "
	Iosef Vissarionovich Dzugashvili "Stalin"	5' 4 "
	Alan Ladd	5' 4 "
	Pablo Picasso	5' 4 "
	Truman Capote	5' 4 "
	Queen Elizabeth	5' 4 "
	Ludwig van Beethoven	5' 4 "
	Typical Homo Erectus	5' 4 "
	typical Neanderthal adult male	5' 4 1/2 "
	Alan Ladd	5' 4 1/2 "
	comte de Buffon	5' 5 " (-)
	Captain Nathaniel Gordon	5' 5 "
	Charles Manson	5' 5 "
	Audie Murphy	5' 5 "
	Harry Houdini	5' 5 "
	Hung Hsiu-ch'üan 洪秀全	5' 5 "
	Marilyn Monroe	5' 5 1/2 "
	T.E. Lawrence "of Arabia"	5' 5 1/2 "
	average runaway male American slave	5' 5-6 "
	Charles Dickens	5' 6? "
	President Benjamin Harrison	5' 6 "
	President Martin Van Buren	5' 6 "
	James Smithson	5' 6 "
	Louisa May Alcott	5' 6 "
	Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	5' 6 1/2 "
	Napoleon Bonaparte	5' 6 1/2 "
	Emily Brontë	5' 6-7 "
	Henry Wadsworth Longfellow	5' ? "
	average height, seaman of 1812	5' 6.85 "
	Oliver Reed Smoot, Jr.	5' 7 "
	minimum height, British soldier	5' 7 "
	President John Adams	5' 7 "
	President John Quincy Adams	5' 7 "
	President William McKinley	5' 7 "
	"Charley" Parkhurst (a female)	5' 7 "





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Ulysses S. Grant	5' 7"
Henry Thoreau	5' 7"
the average male of Thoreau's period	5' 7 ¹ / ₂ "
Edgar Allan Poe	5' 8"
President Ulysses S. Grant	5' 8"
President William H. Harrison	5' 8"
President James Polk	5' 8"
President Zachary Taylor	5' 8"
average height, soldier of 1812	5' 8.35"
President Rutherford B. Hayes	5' 8 ¹ / ₂ "
President Millard Fillmore	5' 9"
President Harry S Truman	5' 9"
President Jimmy Carter	5' 9 ¹ / ₂ "
Herman Melville	5' 9 ³ / ₄ "
Calvin Coolidge	5' 10"
Andrew Johnson	5' 10"
Theodore Roosevelt	5' 10"
Thomas Paine	5' 10"
Franklin Pierce	5' 10"
Abby May Alcott	5' 10"
Reverend Henry C. Wright	5' 10"
Nathaniel Hawthorne	5' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
Louis "Deerfoot" Bennett	5' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
Friend John Greenleaf Whittier	5' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
President Dwight D. Eisenhower	5' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
Sojourner Truth	5' 11"
President Grover Cleveland	5' 11"
President Herbert Hoover	5' 11"
President Woodrow Wilson	5' 11"
President Jefferson Davis	5' 11"
President Richard M. Nixon	5' 11 ¹ / ₂ "
Robert Voorhis the hermit of Rhode Island	< 6'
Frederick Douglass	6' (-)
Anthony Burns	6' 0"
Waldo Emerson	6' 0"
Joseph Smith, Jr.	6' 0"
David Walker	6' 0"
Sarah F. Wakefield	6' 0"



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Thomas Wentworth Higginson	6'0"
President James Buchanan	6'0"
President Gerald R. Ford	6'0"
President James Garfield	6'0"
President Warren Harding	6'0"
President John F. Kennedy	6'0"
President James Monroe	6'0"
President William H. Taft	6'0"
President John Tyler	6'0"
John Brown	6'0(+)"
President Andrew Jackson	6'1"
Alfred Russel Wallace	6'1"
President Ronald Reagan	6'1"
Venture Smith	6'1 ¹ / ₂ "
John Camel Heenan	6'2"
Crispus Attucks	6'2"
President Chester A. Arthur	6'2"
President George Bush, Senior	6'2"
President Franklin D. Roosevelt	6'2"
President George Washington	6'2"



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Gabriel Prosser	6' 2"
Dangerfield Newby	6' 2"
Charles Augustus Lindbergh	6' 2"
President Bill Clinton	6' 2 ¹ / ₂ "
President Thomas Jefferson	6' 2 ¹ / ₂ "
President Lyndon B. Johnson	6' 3"
Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.	6' 3"
Richard "King Dick" Seaver	6' 3 ¹ / ₄ "
President Abraham Lincoln	6' 4"
Marion Morrison (AKA John Wayne)	6' 4"
Elisha Reynolds Potter, Senior	6' 4"
Thomas Cholmondeley	6' 4" (?)
Franklin Benjamin Sanborn	6' 5"
Peter the Great of Russia	6' 7"
Giovanni Battista Belzoni	6' 7"
Thomas Jefferson (the statue)	7' 6"
Jefferson Davis (the statue)	7' 7"
Martin Van Buren Bates	7' 11 ¹ / ₂ "
M. Bihin, a Belgian exhibited in Boston in 1840	8'
Anna Haining Swan	8' 1"





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1760

November 27, Thursday: [John Brown](#) got married with Sarah Smith (1738-1825). Now at the John Brown mansion in [Providence, Rhode Island](#), the docents allege that Mrs. Brown was a Quaker, but if they are speaking of this Sarah Smith whom John Brown married in 1760, Sarah was the daughter of Daniel and Dorcas (Harris) Smith. Was that family [Quaker](#) rather than [Baptist](#)? **Well, did Quakers engage in the distilling of alcohol?** –There is no record that might indicate such, nor is there any record that any young woman was disowned by the Friends for “marrying out,” as inevitably would have followed. (This marriage is recorded in Volume I, page 170 and in Volume II, page 5 of the Providence city records: they were “m. by Elder Samuel Winsor.”)



However, when a Los Angeles newsman who forthrightly admits that he is no historian, Charles Rappleye, came to town a few years back in the search for a story to tell in order to make some money, he made the mistake of crediting the preposterous account offered to him by these docents. So now, this is what he has written on pages 26 and 27 of his *SONS OF PROVIDENCE: THE BROWN BROTHERS, THE SLAVE TRADE, AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*, a trade press book put out without any fact checking in 2006:

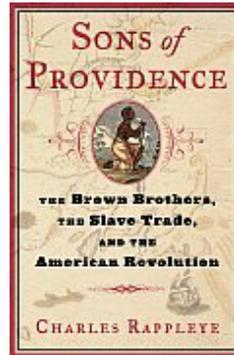
When John was wed, in 1760, at the age of twenty-four, he reached outside his family congregation and chose a Quaker, Sarah Smith, the daughter of a successful merchant and distiller. Their wedding was a gala celebration attended by most of the town's elite; the Browns borrowed coaches and carriages to ferry their guests from the nuptials to the reception. The next day, John moved his new bride into a new home, one of the first brick buildings to be erected on Towne Street. He furnished it with new chairs and looking glasses imported from Philadelphia, along with burnished walnut desks and bookcases made by John Goddard at Newport, regarded ever since as exemplars of colonial



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craftsmanship.



(Several times now, in casual conversations in Providence, I have had people recommend this book to me. I have been unfailingly polite in such situations, and by polite I mean unfailingly nonresponsive. However, allow me to state here now, once, and this is for the record: if you have read this book and think it worthy then you are either too stupid or too totally uninformed to be allowed to remain alive. — In a just world you would already have been eaten by alligators.)



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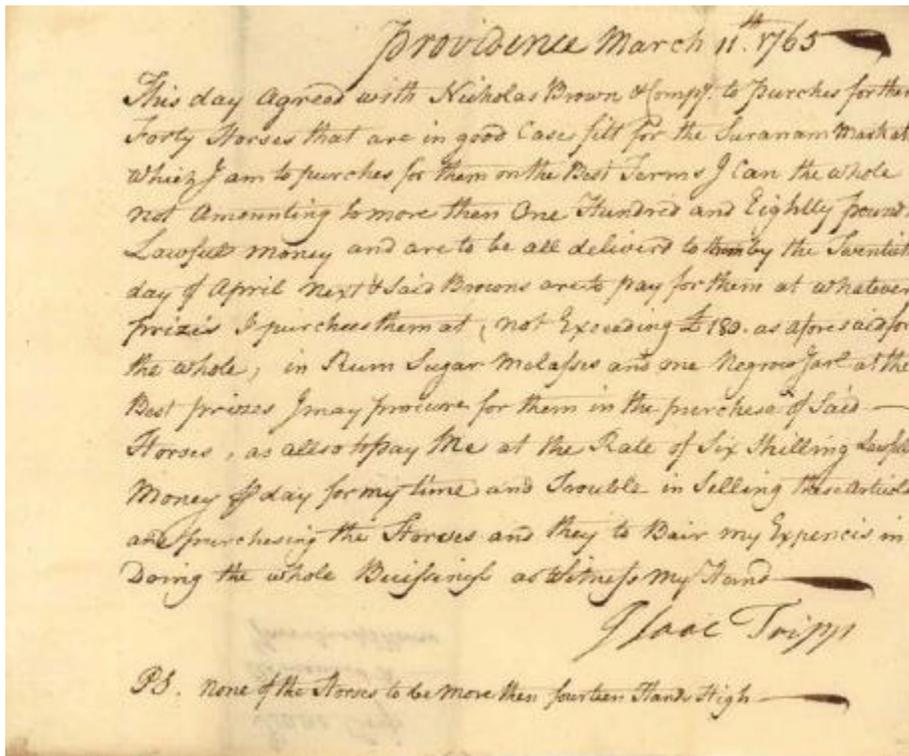
1762

June 17, Thursday: Obadiah Brown died. [Moses Brown](#) was made the executor of his estate. The Obadiah Brown & Co. firm of [Rhode Island](#) was divided among the surviving four brothers Moses Brown, Nicholas Brown, [John Brown](#), and Joseph Brown ([James Brown](#), Junior having died early), and renamed as Nicholas Brown & Co.

In roughly this timeframe, [Moses Brown](#) copied the coat of arms of a Brown family of Essex, England (with which the Brown family of [Providence](#) had no apparent tie), to create a design for the wedding silver he was ordering from a Boston silversmith. The design featured a spreadeagle above three lion paws, with a motto "Gaudeo" meaning "I rejoice." Later, [John Brown](#) would also adopt this as his coat of arms (except that for "Old Thunder," a more appropriate motto might have been "Audeo," meaning "I hear my roar").

1765

The Brown Brothers of [Providence, Rhode Island](#), richie rich, were accustomed to treating persons as things. They routinely had no qualms about exchanging things for persons, and persons for things:



Thus we should treat it as no aberration, no fluke, no mere unfortunate happenstance, that in this year their [negrero](#) brigantine [Sally](#) experienced difficulties. (When you are accustomed to treating persons as things and vicey versa, for instance treating persons as cargo, cargo being something that is sometimes damaged in transit, you can expect that some of the persons you are dealing in will be damaged or lost in transit. It goes without saying.) For the papers of the *Sally*, Governor [Stephen Hopkins](#) had used the blank back of a pass that had been issued by the British admiralty in regard to another vessel on another voyage quite completed. The front of the parchment having been used, the back was available as colonial document paper. I have inspected that parchment and its seals; it is very much the worse for wear and is now preserved at the John Carter Brown



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Library at Brown University. It reads like this:

*By the Honorable Stephen Hopkins
Esquire, Governor, and Comtander [sic] in Chief of the Colony of Rhode Island.
I certify that this Day I delivered this Pass to Ezek Hopkins Master of the Brigantine
Sally of Providence in said Colony of Rhode Island of the Burthen of one Hundred and twenty five Tons
mounted with Six Guns and navigated with fourteen Men, all Subjects of His Britannic Majesty Rhode
Island built, and bound for Africa and the West Indies. For which Pass the said Master hath given
Bond and taken the [hole in parchment] Oath to entitle him to Such Pass there being a new [??] in said Colony.
Given under my Hand and Seal at Arme [??] at Rhode Island this eighth Day of
September one Thousand Seven Hundred and Sixty four, and in the fourth Year of His
Majesty's Reign George the third King of Great Britain &c.*

Step Hopkins

((Tax Stamp with "68" and "GR" and a crown and a quite large and ornate "GR"))

Of the 167 Africans she was transporting in chains, 109 were lost.⁵

THE BROWN BROTHERS
THE MIDDLE PASSAGE
SLAVERY

During this year, on the [Pawtuxet](#) River in [Rhode Island](#), Furnace Hope was organized by [Stephen Hopkins](#), Esquire, and others such as the merchant Brown brothers. This furnace would cast cannon from local bog iron ore during the American Revolution.

THE BROWN BROTHERS

5. The other ships were the *Mary* and the *Wheel of Fortune*. To repel pirates, the *Sally* carried 7 swivel guns and a keg of powder, two pairs of ship pistols, 8 "small Arms," 2 "Blunder Bursers," and 13 "Cutleshes," and to keep the male Africans under control, also, 3 long chains with a dozen "pad Locks," 40 "hand Cufs," and 40 "Shekels." We can infer that this ship was not named in honor of Sally Hemings, President [Thomas Jefferson](#)'s common-law wife/real-law slave, and mother of a number of his children — as she had not yet been born.



JOHN “OLDTHUNDER” BROWN

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August 28, Wednesday: During the [Middle Passage](#) of the [Sally](#) from the Guinea coast of Africa toward the slave plantations of the West Indies, Captain [Esek Hopkins](#) of [Rhode Island](#) had encountered a considerable amount of illness and disability among the white seamen of his crew. Also, three more members of the cargo had succumbed. He had therefore pressed four of the seemingly compliant male blacks of the cargo into service above decks, and they had seemed to be making themselves helpful with the sails. In the language of the time “he was obliged to permit some of the slaves to come on deck to assist the people.” However, these four men had been merely biding their time, and on this day attempted to set free the other surviving blacks of the cargo. To reassert control the crew needed to fire upon their assets, killing eight outright and wounding a number of others, two of whom would also eventually die during the remainder of the voyage. In addition, some of the blacks leaped overboard in the midst of the ocean and, their heads bobbing in the swell, could not be retrieved. The venture’s opportunities to offer profit to the [Providence](#) firm of [Nicholas Brown](#) and Company were beginning to seem rather marginal.⁶

TRIANGULAR TRADE

During the remainder of the voyage, some additional members of the cargo would perish through refusal to accept nourishment.

6. At the end of the voyage, only 108 of the original 196 would be deliverable to their new slave lives in America. The slaves had been acquired along the coast of Africa for about £5-£10 each or a total of about £1,500 and the survivors were disposed of for about £20 each or a total of about £2,000, a gross profit of about £500, but from such a gross figure must be subtracted all the considerable expenses of the voyage and of crew salaries and of not being able to use the ship for any other purpose for a year. All told, the Browns of [Providence](#) would lose £9,000-£10,000 during this particular sailing venture. [Moses Brown](#) would later point out that overall, their firm’s slave trade with the [Mary](#), the [Wheel of Fortune](#), and the [Sally](#) had resulted in loss rather than in the adding to of the Brown family assets, despite the fact that of the brothers, [John Brown](#) individually would see fit to continue in this trade.

We need not mention how Disagreeable the Nuse of your Luseing 88 slaves is to us & all your Friends, but your Self Continuing in Helth is so Grate Satisfaction to us that we Remain Cheirful under the Heavy Loss of our Ints.



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

1767

May: [John Brown](#) and [Moses Brown](#) were engaged in a campaign to bring universal public education to the children of [Providence, Rhode Island](#). At this point Moses called publicly for a property tax that would support this, citing as his justification not the personal needs of the town's poorer children but instead the chronic need that the town's businesses was experiencing, for young workers of an improved educational background and greater employee capabilities.⁷

THE BROWN BROTHERS

December 2, Wednesday: [John Brown](#) spoke before the town meeting of [Providence, Rhode Island](#), advocating universal public education (clearly, in the code of that era, "universal" was being understood by all to indicate "white children only"), and his plan was accepted.

7. It is clear from the architecture proposed, that at this time the brothers were thinking of a co-educational school that would teach girls as well as boys, albeit separately, but were also thinking of a racially exclusive school that would of course be utilized only by the children of the white citizens.



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

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1768

January 1, Friday: A month earlier, [John Brown](#) had carried along the town meeting of [Providence, Rhode Island](#), and a decision had been made that the town would make education available to all the town children. This had become a source of concern for the proprietors of private schools already in existence, and in addition, to the shock of [Moses Brown](#), had become a source of concern for "the poorer sort of people" — precisely the families whose children would most have benefitted. (Was it because these lower income families simply could not afford to lose the pittance of weekly wages that their small working children could bring home?)

THE BROWN BROTHERS

This follow-on town meeting attempted to cope with the controversy by voting for the construction of one 2-story brick schoolhouse, with tax monies to be supplemented by private subscription.

February: After the [Providence, Rhode Island](#) town meeting voted the construction of one 2-story brick schoolhouse, with tax monies to be supplemented by private subscription, [John Brown](#) and [Moses Brown](#) had gone to work and arranged that this Town School House replace the ruins of the old town courthouse. The supplemental moneys would come from family members, and from friends of the Brown family.

THE BROWN BROTHERS

Instruction was to take place on the ground floor, with the upstairs floor would be devoted to private offices. Construction would require two years.



JOHN “OLDTHUNDER” BROWN

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July 6, Monday: At the Ephrata Community in what is now Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Johann Conrad Beissel died. He had been born in Eberbach in Germany and had come to Pennsylvania in 1720, and in 1732 had established his semi-monastic community at Ephrata, known as “Camp of the Solitary,” a community which by the time of his death had come to include not only a monastery, “Brother House,” but also a convent, “Sister House.”



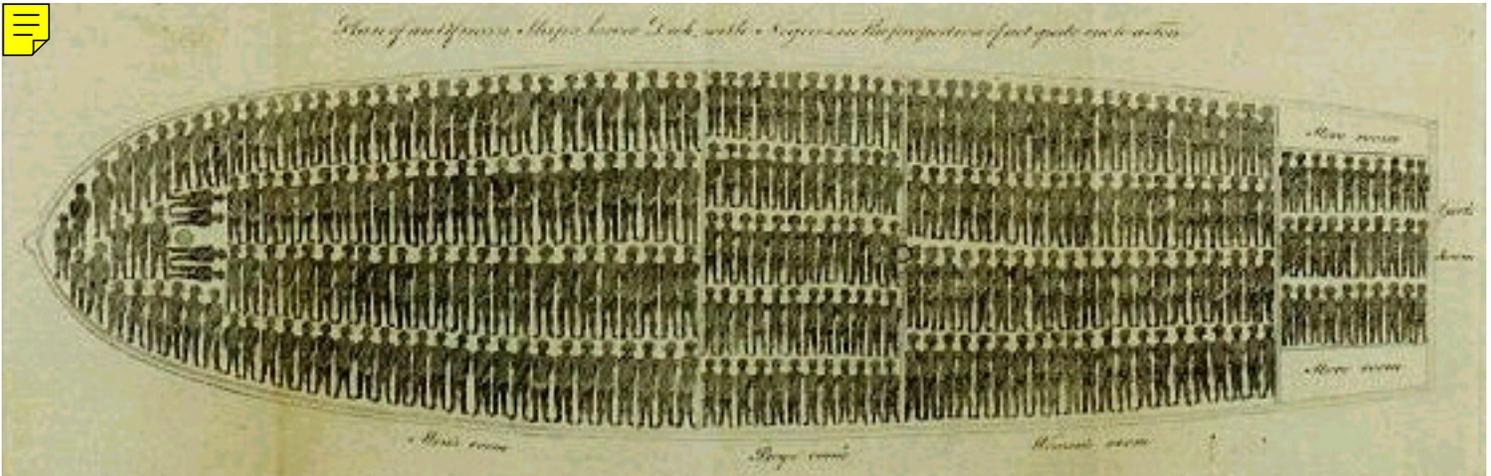
COMMUNITARIANISM

In [Providence, Rhode Island](#), [Moses Brown](#) wrote to document to his brothers formally, that “my health is so impaired as to be much injured by a close attention to any kind of business, and I have concluded to leave the care and charge of my part of the business of the company this summer and fall, among you.”

THE BROWN BROTHERS

1769

In [Rhode Island](#) in this year, it is estimated by Alexander Boyd Hawes, some 16 vessels were being fitted out for the [international slave trade](#). If an average cargo of [slaves](#) was 109—as we have estimated on the basis of a number of known cargos— then a total of well over 1,700 souls were being transported in Rhode Island bottoms alone. An example would be the brig *Othello*,⁸ which in this year is known to have transported a cargo of 90 souls.



In the winter of this year [John Brown](#) would be fitting out a vessel for another slaving expedition to Guinea, but this time instead of using the *Sally* he would be using a vessel with a larger carrying capacity, the *Sultan*. The intent would be to make back all the money that had been lost, and then some.

At about this point in time, the colony of Connecticut was attempting to prohibit all importation of [slaves](#). It was attempting to prohibit this importation not because such was being adjudged to be injurious to the slaves but because such was being adjudged to be injurious to the poor people (poor white people) who needed to compete on the open market with their free labor, and not because such was being adjudged to be inconvenient to the slaves but because such was being adjudged to be inconvenient to the white citizens of Connecticut — the people, after all, who really mattered:

Title and text not found. "Whereas, the increase of slaves is injurious to the poor, and inconvenient, therefore," etc. Fowler, HISTORICAL STATUS OF THE NEGRO IN CONNECTICUT, in LOCAL LAW, etc., page 125.

Two inventions important to the development of the cloth industry occurred during this year. Richard Arkwright developed a water-frame and throstle, and James Watt devised a steam-engine. Because these developments would have an impact on the demand for bales of [cotton](#) as a raw material for cloth, it would eventually have an impact on the demand for field labor to grow this cotton, and therefore would have consequences in terms of human [slavery](#) — and in terms of the [international slave trade](#).⁹

8. *Othello* — a strange name for a [negro](#) vessel during an era in which, in presentations of [William Shakespeare](#)'s play, the title role was necessarily being performed by an American white man wearing dark body makeup! —Obviously, some Shakespeare nut in Rogue Island had a considerable sense of humor! —What's next, the brigantine *Gen. Nat Turner*?



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

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W.E. Burghardt Du Bois: The history of slavery and the slave-trade after 1820 must be read in the light of the industrial revolution through which the civilized world passed in the first half of the nineteenth century. Between the years 1775 and 1825 occurred economic events and changes of the highest importance and widest influence. Though all branches of industry felt the impulse of this new industrial life, yet, "if we consider single industries, cotton manufacture has, during the nineteenth century, made the most magnificent and gigantic advances."¹⁰ This fact is easily explained by the remarkable series of inventions that revolutionized this industry between 1738 and 1830, including Arkwright's, Watt's, Compton's, and Cartwright's epoch-making contrivances.¹¹ The effect which these inventions had on the manufacture of cotton goods is best illustrated by the fact that in England, the chief cotton market of the world, the consumption of raw cotton rose steadily from 13,000 bales in 1781, to 572,000 in 1820, to 871,000 in 1830, and to 3,366,000 in 1860.¹² Very early, therefore, came the query whence the supply of raw cotton was to come. Tentative experiments on the rich, broad fields of the Southern United States, together with the indispensable invention of Whitney's cotton-gin, soon answered this question: a new economic future was opened up to this land, and immediately the whole South began to extend its cotton culture, and more and more to throw its whole energy into this one staple.

Here it was that the fatal mistake of compromising with slavery in the beginning, and of the policy of *laissez-faire* pursued thereafter, became painfully manifest; for, instead now of a healthy, normal, economic development along proper industrial lines, we have the abnormal and fatal rise of a slave-labor large farming system, which, before it was realized, had so intertwined itself with and braced itself upon the economic forces of an industrial age, that a vast and terrible civil war

9. Bear in mind that in early periods the Southern states of the United States of America produced no significant amount of [cotton](#) fiber for export — such production not beginning until 1789. In fact, according to page 92 of Seybert's STATISTICS, in 1784 a small parcel of cotton that had found its way from the US to Liverpool had been refused admission to England, because it was the customs agent's opinion that this involved some sort of subterfuge: it could not have originated in the United States.

10. Beer, *GESCHICHTE DES WELTHANDELS IM 19^{TE} JAHRHUNDERT*, II. 67.

11. A list of these inventions most graphically illustrates this advance: —

1738, John Jay, fly-shuttle. John Wyatt, spinning by rollers.

1748, Lewis Paul, carding-machine.

1760, Robert Kay, drop-box.

1769, Richard Arkwright, water-frame and throstle. James Watt, steam-engine.

1772, James Lees, improvements on carding-machine.

1775, Richard Arkwright, series of combinations.

1779, Samuel Compton, mule.

1785, Edmund Cartwright, power-loom.

1803-4, Radcliffe and Johnson, dressing-machine.

1817, Roberts, fly-frame.

1818, William Eaton, self-acting frame.

1825-30, Roberts, improvements on mule.

Cf. Baines, *HISTORY OF THE COTTON MANUFACTURE*, pages 116-231; *ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA*, 9th ed., article "Cotton."

12. Baines, *HISTORY OF THE COTTON MANUFACTURE*, page 215. A bale weighed from 375 lbs. to 400 lbs.



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

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was necessary to displace it. The tendencies to a patriarchal serfdom, recognizable in the age of Washington and Jefferson, began slowly but surely to disappear; and in the second quarter of the century Southern slavery was irresistibly changing from a family institution to an industrial system.

The development of Southern slavery has heretofore been viewed so exclusively from the ethical and social standpoint that we are apt to forget its close and indissoluble connection with the world's cotton market. Beginning with 1820, a little after the close of the Napoleonic wars, when the industry of cotton manufacture had begun its modern development and the South had definitely assumed her position as chief producer of raw cotton, we find the average price of cotton per pound, $8\frac{1}{2}d$. From this time until 1845 the price steadily fell, until in the latter year it reached $4d$.; the only exception to this fall was in the years 1832-1839, when, among other things, a strong increase in the English demand, together with an attempt of the young slave power to "corner" the market, sent the price up as high as $11d$. The demand for cotton goods soon outran a crop which McCullough had pronounced "prodigious," and after 1845 the price started on a steady rise, which, except for the checks suffered during the continental revolutions and the Crimean War, continued until 1860.¹³ The steady increase in the production of cotton explains the fall in price down to 1845. In 1822 the crop was a half-million bales; in 1831, a million; in 1838, a million and a half; and in 1840-1843, two million. By this time the world's consumption of cotton goods began to increase so rapidly that, in spite of the increase in Southern crops, the price kept rising. Three million bales were gathered in 1852, three and a half million in 1856, and the remarkable crop of five million bales in 1860.¹⁴

Here we have data to explain largely the economic development of the South. By 1822 the large-plantation slave system had gained footing; in 1838-1839 it was able to show its power in the cotton "corner;" by the end of the next decade it had not only gained a solid economic foundation, but it had built a closed oligarchy with a political policy. The changes in price during the next few years drove out of competition many survivors of the small-farming free-labor system, and put the slave *régime* in position to dictate the policy of the nation. The zenith of the system and the first inevitable signs of decay came in the years 1850-1860, when the rising price of cotton threw the whole economic energy of the South into its cultivation, leading to a terrible consumption of soil and slaves, to a great increase in the size of plantations, and to increasing power and effrontery on the part of the slave barons. Finally, when a rising moral crusade conjoined with threatened economic disaster, the oligarchy, encouraged by the state of the cotton market, risked all on a political *coup-d'état*, which failed in the war of 1861-1865.¹⁵

13. The prices cited are from Newmarch and Tooke, and refer to the London market. The average price in 1855-60 was about $7d$.

14. From United States census reports.

15. Cf. United States census reports; and Olmsted, THE COTTON KINGDOM.



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1770

February: The town and county of Warren having subscribed a total of £4,200 toward the erection of a college building, the [Rhode Island](#) College Corporation settled on [Providence](#), rather than upon [Warren](#) or [Newport](#), as the permanent home of their [Baptist](#) institution of higher education, and during the course of this year the building now known as University Hall would be erected by the contractor, [Nicholas Brown](#) & Company, in part by the use of slave labor. The pastor of the First Baptist Church of Providence desired to retire from the duties of his office, and that church invited President Manning to preach provisionally for them. Therefore the Reverend [James Manning](#) relocated from Warren to preach provisionally at Providence's 1st [Baptist](#) Church as well as



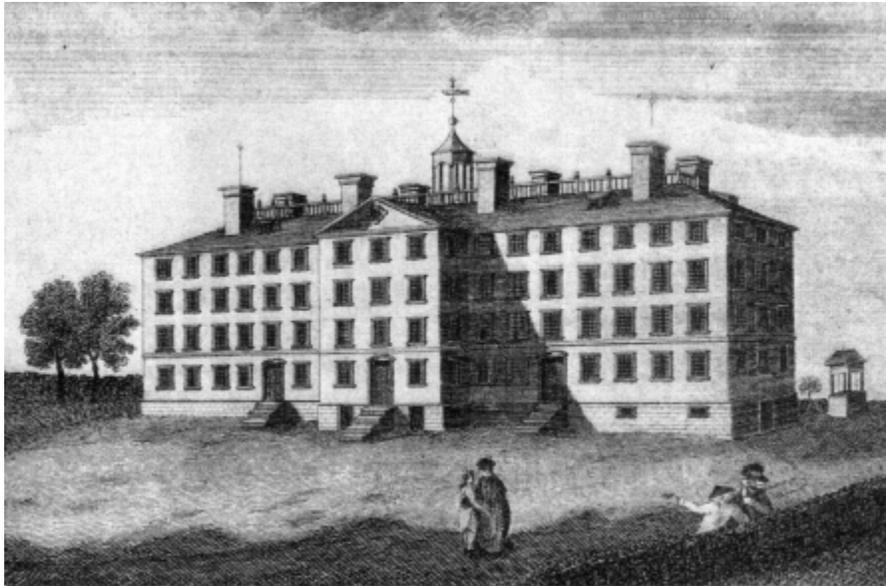
to continue to lead his Latin School. (During this year the Reverend was [manumitting](#) his only black [slave](#). His Warren Latin School, which would soon eventuate as the Providence "University Grammar-School," and is now known as [Brown University](#), now admits black Americans as students: as I write this, a case is pending in regard to three white male students, accused of manhandling a black female student in front of a dorm while informing her that "You're just a quota." The black female student had, it would appear, attracted their ire because allegedly she had neglected to hold the door open for another student who was entering the dorm — these three white male students having decided, it would seem, upon an "open door" policy all of their own.)



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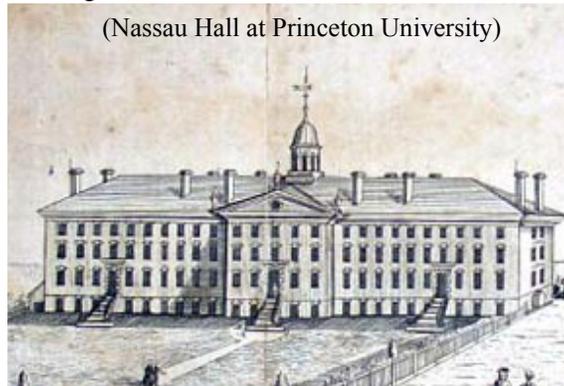
May: In [Providence, Rhode Island](#) on an 8-acre parcel of land “above the smoke & stir of this dim spot” atop what is now known as College Hill purchased partly from [John Brown](#) and [Moses Brown](#), the cornerstone of the [College of Rhode Island](#)’s permanent home, the College Edifice, was laid. The Brown brothers’ firm Nicholas Brown & Company had charge of the construction. At least two slaves contributed their labor to the effort.



BROWN UNIVERSITY

This was to be a scale model of Nassau Hall in [Princeton](#), and was to consist of five stories, of brick with a cement covering, sporting a small belfry, in all 150 feet long by 46 feet deep — considerably smaller than the [New Jersey](#) original but by far the largest building in this small colony, its previous largest building having of course been the Quaker [Great Meetinghouse](#) at Newport. Rotund little [John Brown](#) got down into the cellar excavation to help lay the first granite block in the southwest wall.

(Nassau Hall at Princeton University)





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1772

June 9, Tuesday-10, Wednesday: A troop of men from [Rhode Island](#) led by Abraham Whipple burned the British 8-gun revenue cutter *Gaspee* — which had run aground off Namquit Point south of [Providence](#).¹⁶ [John Brown](#) or his slave Aaron Briggs shot and wounded Lieutenant William Dudingston (1740-1817), the ship's captain. Arnold states in his account of the destruction of the *Gaspee* that this skipper "had practiced every arrogance upon vessels in the bay, detaining them often without a colorable pretext, stopping even market boats, and in some cases plundering people on shore." Despite the offer of a huge reward for information, there would of course be no local people arrested.

Although the taking of the *Gaspee* has been held to be the first assault by the American colonists against the crown, actually this was much the same sort of thing as the [Newport](#) locals having fired a cannon at the *St. John* in July 1764,¹⁷ having seized and burned a boat of the *Maidstone* in May 1765,¹⁸ and having scuttled the British armed revenue sloop *Liberty* in 1769.¹⁹



All the hostilities against naval vessels bearing the king's colors occurred because of specific problems the specific vessels had been creating, and nothing in the action taken in June 1772 makes it differ remarkably from these previous resistances.

Karl W. Doerflinger, an illustrator of East Providence, has recently created an over-the-gun-cabinet-in-the-

16. Arnold's HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND, page 309.
17. Arnold's HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND, page 252.
18. Arnold's HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND, page 255.
19. Arnold's HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND, page 297.

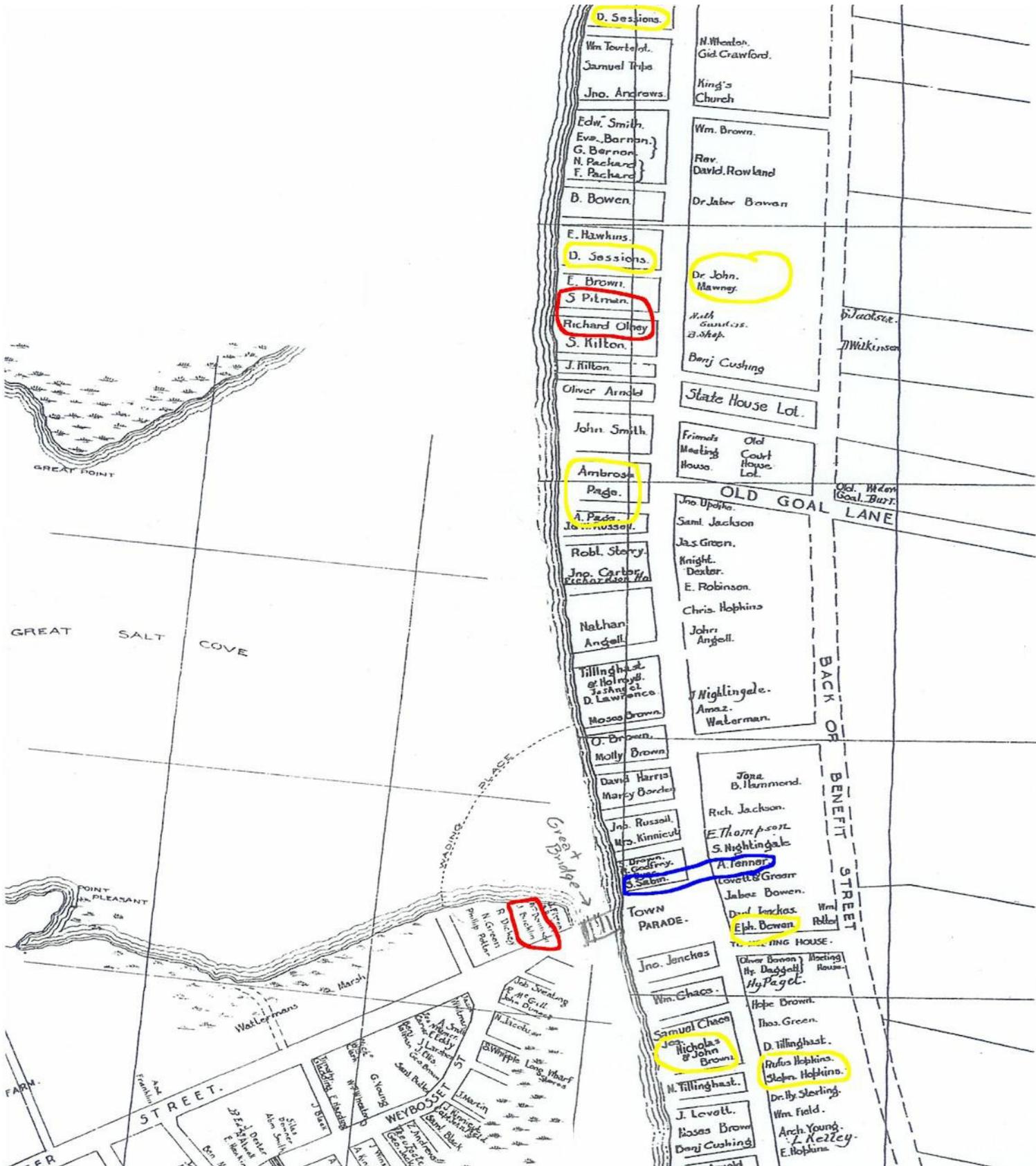
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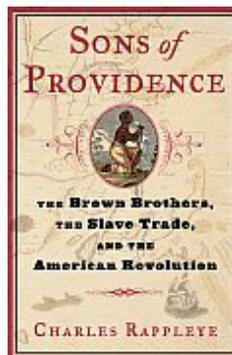
living-room version of the burning of the *Gaspee*:



September: One afternoon, while [Moses Brown](#) and his wife [Anna Brown](#) were visiting friends in [Boston](#), Anna collapsed. The doctors were mystified. The remainder of her short life would be spent in a sickbed.

Charles Rappleye, in *SONS OF PROVIDENCE: THE BROWN BROTHERS, THE SLAVE TRADE, AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006, page 129), has recently alleged that the involvement with Quakerism at the 2d Friends meetinghouse inside [Providence, Rhode Island](#) (the structure at North Main Street between South Court Street and Meeting Street, a structure that would be sold and relocated in 1844 and then rebuilt on that site), an involvement with Quakerism that had begun in about this timeframe, was not limited to Moses Brown and Anna Brown, but extended to Anna's sister [Mary Brown](#) and to [John Brown](#)'s wife Sarah Smith Brown:

Late in her life, Anna had begun to attend Quaker services, along with her sister Mary and John Brown's wife, Sarah. The meetinghouse was in Providence, though the services were conducted under the auspices of [Smithfield](#), a small town to the east²⁰ that was home to the Monthly Meeting. With Anna bedridden and declining, Moses began attending there as well.



20. Yet another incautious error: the two [Smithfield](#) meetinghouses are to the north and northwest of Providence, definitely not to the east of Providence.



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Adequate sources are not cited, and the only source I have been able to imagine for the above conceptualization of the situation by Rappleye, is that he has perhaps incautiously extrapolated from Mack Thompson's *MOSES BROWN: RELUCTANT REFORMER* (Chapel Hill NC: U of North Carolina P, 1962), adding to Thompson's description his own entirely unfounded presumption that Mrs. John Brown had before her wedding been a Quaker girl — for on page 74 of Thompson we find the following:

After Moses moved her from Boston to Providence, he sat throughout the fall and winter by his wife's bedside and watched her die. Anna knew that she was dying and as her time approached she turned more and more to God for comfort; Moses turned with her. In search for some explanation for his wife's affliction, and no doubt in an attempt to find some comfort for his grief, he began to attend religious services at the Quaker meetinghouse in Providence. Anna could not, of course, accompany him, but he brought Friends to visit her and silent meetings were held by her bedside; together they moved away from the Baptist Church and toward acceptance of Friends' doctrines.

Thompson added on page 77 that:

Why Moses turned to Quakerism for spiritual comfort rather than to the family church is difficult to determine. Undoubtedly he was influenced by his wife who became a spiritual Quaker before she died, and by her sisters, Mary and Phebe, and John's wife, Sarah, who were attending Friends' meetings as early as the winter of 1773, and perhaps earlier. Even that old rascal Uncle Elisha had "got religion," and was attending Friends' meetings. Perhaps Moses followed their lead.



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1773

November 10, Wednesday: Prominent businessman [Moses Brown](#), owner or part owner of ten human beings other than himself (Moses Brown Papers, II, 18), stricken with grief at the premature death of his wife (his 1st cousin Anna Brown, daughter of Obadiah Brown, who had died on February 5th), on his way to becoming a [Quaker](#), made out a [manumission](#) document for his [slaves](#) awarding them the use of one acre each of his 200-acre farm



"Elmgrove" on the back side of Prospect Hill for their sustenance (Bonno, about 34 years of age, Ceafer, 32 years of age, Cudge,²¹ 27 years of age and born in [Rhode Island](#), Prime, about 25 years of age, Pegg, 20 years of age and born in [Providence](#), and Pero, about 18 years of age), and also for all slaves in whom he held a part interest (Yarrow, about 40 years of age,²² Tom, about 30 years of age, Newport, about 21 years of age, and Phillis, about 2 years of age, who had been born in his family):

21. A grandson of Cudge, [William J. Brown](#), would describe [Moses Brown](#) as a person who "considered himself a Christian man," choosing that description over the simpler "Christian man" or the more specific "Quaker." Why would he write in such manner, in regard to this benevolent rich white man who had freed his grandfather? William would point out that Moses had come to believe that Cudge had paid for himself by his satisfactory labor and that it would therefore be improper to hold him any longer in slavery, despite the fact that Cudge was "his property." Professor Joanne Pope Melish's explanation of this would rely upon the concept of compensated emancipation: "Like most antislavery advocates of his time, Moses Brown believed that slavery was sinful but could not conceive of slaves as having rights to freedom that superseded the property rights of their owners. Moses Brown freed his slaves in an act of compensated emancipation — after the labor of his slaves had 'paid off' their purchase price."

22. Yarrow had been owned jointly by the Brown brothers, who worked him at their spermaceti candle works in today's Fox Point. Moses released his quarter share but [John Brown](#) of course refused to reciprocate. From his deathbed Yarrow would have the last word: "Tell him to come and take his quarter or I shall soon be free."

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Whereas I am clearly convinced that the Buying and Selling of Men of what Colour Soever as Slaves is Contrary to the Divine Mind manifest in the Conscience of all Men, however some may smother and neglect its Reproving, and being also made Sensible that the Holding Negroes in Slavery, however Kindly Treated by their Masters has a Great Tendency to Incurage the Iniquitous Traffick and Practice of Importing them from their Native Country, and is contrary to that Justice, Mercy and Humility Injoind as the duty of every Christian. I Do therefore by these presents for my Self my Heirs & Mannumit and set Free the following Negroes being all I am Possesed of or am any ways Interested in Viz. Bonno an African aged about 34: years Ceaser aged 32. years. Cudge aged 27. years Born in this Colony. Prime an african aged about 25. years. Pero an African aged about 18. years. Pegg Born in this Town aged 20: years. And One Quarter being the part I own of the three Following africans viz - Yarrow aged about 40: years. Tom aged about 30: years. and Newport aged about 21: years - And a Child Phillis aged about Two years born in my Family, she having the same Natural Right, I hereby give her the same power as my own Children to Take and Use her Freedom Injoining upon my Heirs a careful watch over her for her Good, and that thay in case I be taken hence, give her Suitable Education, or if she be bound out [that] they take care in that and other respects as much as to White Children hereby expressly prohibiting my Self and my Heirs from Assuming any further power over, or property in her - And as all prudent men Lay up in Times of health and Strength so much of their Honnest Earnings as is over and above [e] their needful expences for Cloathing &c, so it is my direction and advice to you that you deposit in my Hands such a part of your Wages as is not from time to Time Wanted, taking my Receipt therefor, to put to - Interest and to apply it for your Support when through Sicknes or otherwise you may be unable to Support your Selves, or to be applyd to the Use of your Children (if Free) and if not to the purchasing their Freedom and if not wanted for these Uses to be Given in your Wills to such persons or for Such Uses as you may think proper. And for your Incouragement to such Sober Prudence and Industry. I hereby Give to the First Six named (the other three having Good Trades) the use of [one] acre o[f] land as marked off on my Farm as long as you Imp[rove] It To Good purpose. I now no Longer consider you as Slaves nor my Self



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as your *Master*, but your *Friend*, and so *Long* as you behave well may you expect my further *Countenance* support and *Assistance*. And as you will consider this as an *Instrument* of extending your *Liberty*, so I hope you will always *Remember* and *Practice* this my earnest desire and advice that accompanies it, that you use not the *Liberty* hereby granted you, to *Licentiousness*, nor take occasion or opportunity thereby to go into or practice the *Lusts* of the *Flesh*, the *Lusts* of the *Eye*, or pride on any *Occasion* or *Temptation*, but be more cautious than heretofore, and with *Love* serve one another, and all *Men*, not only to please *Men*, but as *Fearing* and *Reverencing* that *Holy God* who *Sees* all the *Secret Actions* of *Men* And receive your *Liberty* with a *Humble* sense of its being a *Favor* from the *Great King* of *Heaven* and *Earth*, who through his *Light* that *Shines* upon the *Consciences* of all *Men*. *Black* as well as *White*, and thereby sheweth us what is *Good*, and that the *Lords* requireings of each of us to do *Justice*, to *Love* *Mercy* and to *Walk Humbly* with our *God*. To the *Cause* of this my *Duty* to you, be therefore *Watchful* and *Attentive* to that *Divine Teaching* in your own *Minds*, that convinces you of *Sin*, and as you *Dutifully* *Obay* its enlightnings and *Teachings* it will not only cause you to avoid *Open Profaneness* and *Wickedness*, as *Stealing*, *Lying*, *Swearing*, *Drinking* *Lusting after Woman*, *Frolicking* and the *Like Sinful Courses*, but will *Teach* you and *Lead* you into all that is *Necessary* for you to *Know*, as your *Duty* to the *Great Master* of all *Men*, for he has said respecting *Mankind* -- *Universally*, I will put my *Law* into their *Inward parts*, and *Write* it in their *Hearts* and they shall all *Know* me from the *Least* to the *Greatest*, & therefore you cant plead *Ignorance* that you dont know your *Duty* to the *God* that made you, because you cant all read his *Mind* and *Will* in the *Scriptures*, which is indeed a great *Favor* and *Blessing* to them that can. *Understand* and *Obay*: But there is a *Book* within you that is not confined to the *English* or any *Language*, and as you *silently* and *Reverently* wait for its *openings* and *Instructions* it will *Teach* you and you will be enabled to understand its *Language*, and as you are carefull to be *Obedient* thereto and *Often* *Silently* read it, you will be able to *Speak* its *Language* -- with *African* as well as *English Tongues* to your poor *Fellow Countrymen* To the *Glory* of him who has *Wrought* your *Deliverance* from *Slavery* To whose *Gracious* *Care* and *protection* I *Commit* and *Fervently* *Recommend*

Recommend you and bid you *Farewell*

Signed this 10th of the 11th Month: 1773 *Moses Brown*

in presence of

Mary Brown

}

Recorded Nov. 12th 1773



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

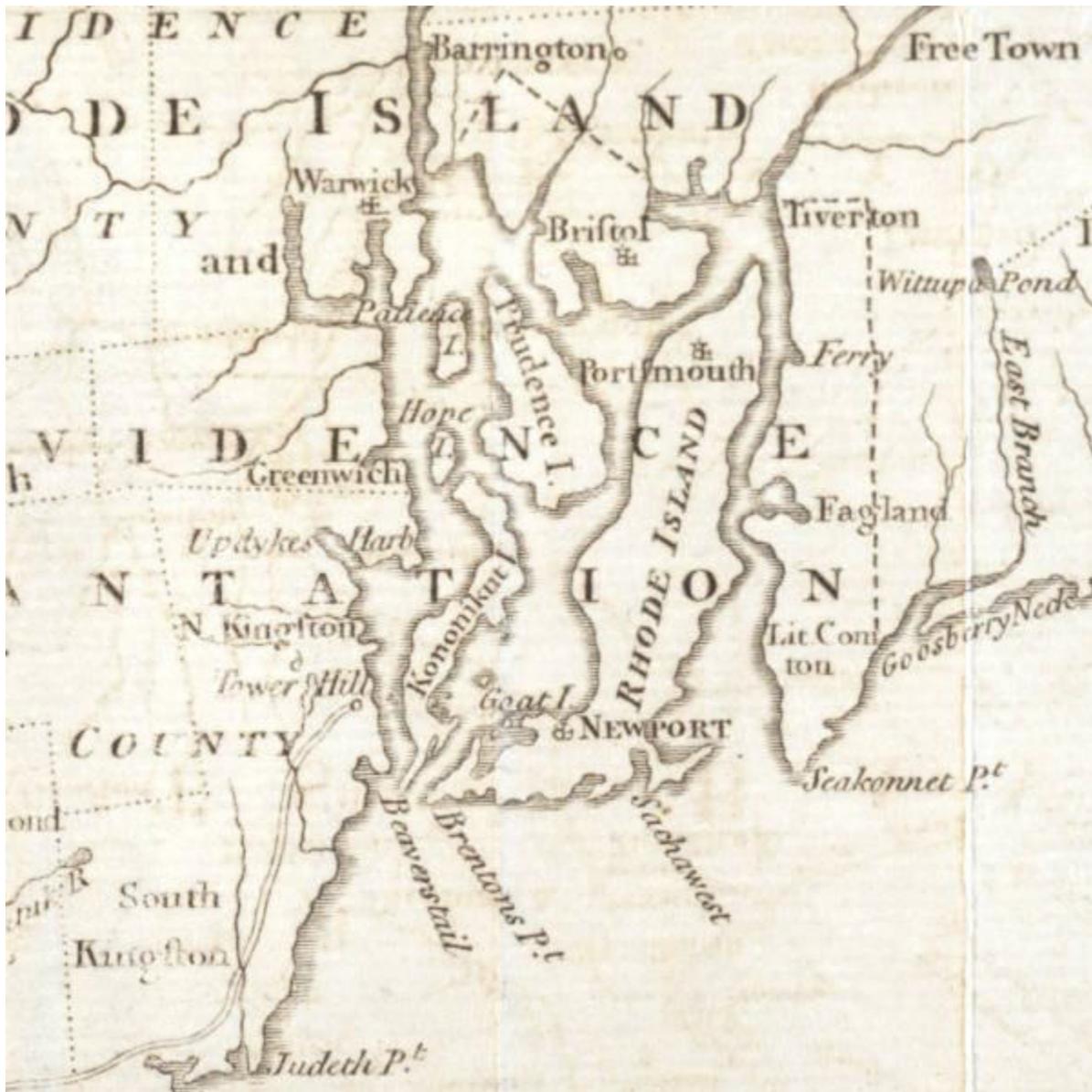
JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

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1774

The colony of [Rhode Island](#) at this point had 59,707 (57,707?) residents residing in 29 incorporated municipalities. Sixteen of the native Americans still alive were in [Bristol](#) (by 1785, this group would have dwindled to two survivors).



The census showed that, in [Providence](#), there were 4,321 persons divided into 655 families living in 421 dwellings.



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Of the Brown brothers, only [Friend Moses Brown](#) had divested himself of his slaves. [John Brown](#) owned two, [Nicholas Brown](#) owned two, and Joseph Brown owned four. In their circle of friends and associates, [Stephen Hopkins](#) owned six (the present Quaker conceit that we had been forced to disown Governor Hopkins for merely refusing to free but one slave, who was perhaps a woman in a special situation, clearly per this census data amounts to no more than that, a present Quaker conceit), [Esek Hopkins](#) owned four, Daniel Jenckes owned four, Jabez Bowen owned one (Prince, who would in 1784 cut a deal for his achieving his freedom as of 1787), and the editor of the Providence [Gazette](#), John Carter, owned one or more.

THE BROWN BROTHERS

During this year Mrs. Ann Smith Hopkins, the Quaker wife of the [Rhode Island](#) Governor Stephen Hopkins who had in the previous year been disowned by the Religious Society of Friends, herself a “birthright Friend,” applied to her Quaker fellows for a routine letter of introduction to be used during her travels in Pennsylvania—a letter stating her to be in good standing in her home worship group—and the Quaker monthly meeting in [Smithfield](#), after duly considering her request, declined to provide this First Lady of Rhode Island with any such routine endorsement.

April: In a revival at the First [Baptist](#) Church of [Providence, Rhode Island](#), a squat structure of oak, 40 feet by 40 feet, the hard benches of which had served the Baptists of Providence for nearly half a century, there had recently been a grand total of 104 conversions. The enlarged congregation of the Reverend [James Manning](#) would require a newer, larger church—the one that is now standing at the foot of College Hill in Providence, its white spike steeple rising almost to the level of the top of the hill. This building would purposely be made large enough to function as a commencement hall for the [College of Rhode Island](#). A Baptist Benevolent Society of eleven men was created to oversee this project, led by [John Brown](#). Joseph Brown and Joseph Hammond would be sent to [Boston](#) to look at the churches there. The final design would be chosen from James Gibbs’s BOOK OF ARCHITECTURE. The structure would be crafted by shipbuilders thrown out of work by the British naval blockade of the recalcitrant port of Boston.

BROWN UNIVERSITY

April 27, Wednesday: [John Brown](#) was setting sail in [Newport](#) harbor to take his *Diana* up to [Providence, Rhode Island](#), along with two freighters containing 300 barrels of flour, when he was hailed by the *Rose*, Captain James Wallace. The *Diana* was boarded and he was transferred to the *Swan*, where the British shut him up in the ship’s brig.

In [Boston](#), the British military officers had offered that anyone who turned in their private firearms would be allowed through the picket lines to escape the hardship of the siege. More than 2,000 muskets, rifles, and pistols were being turned in at Faneuil Hall.

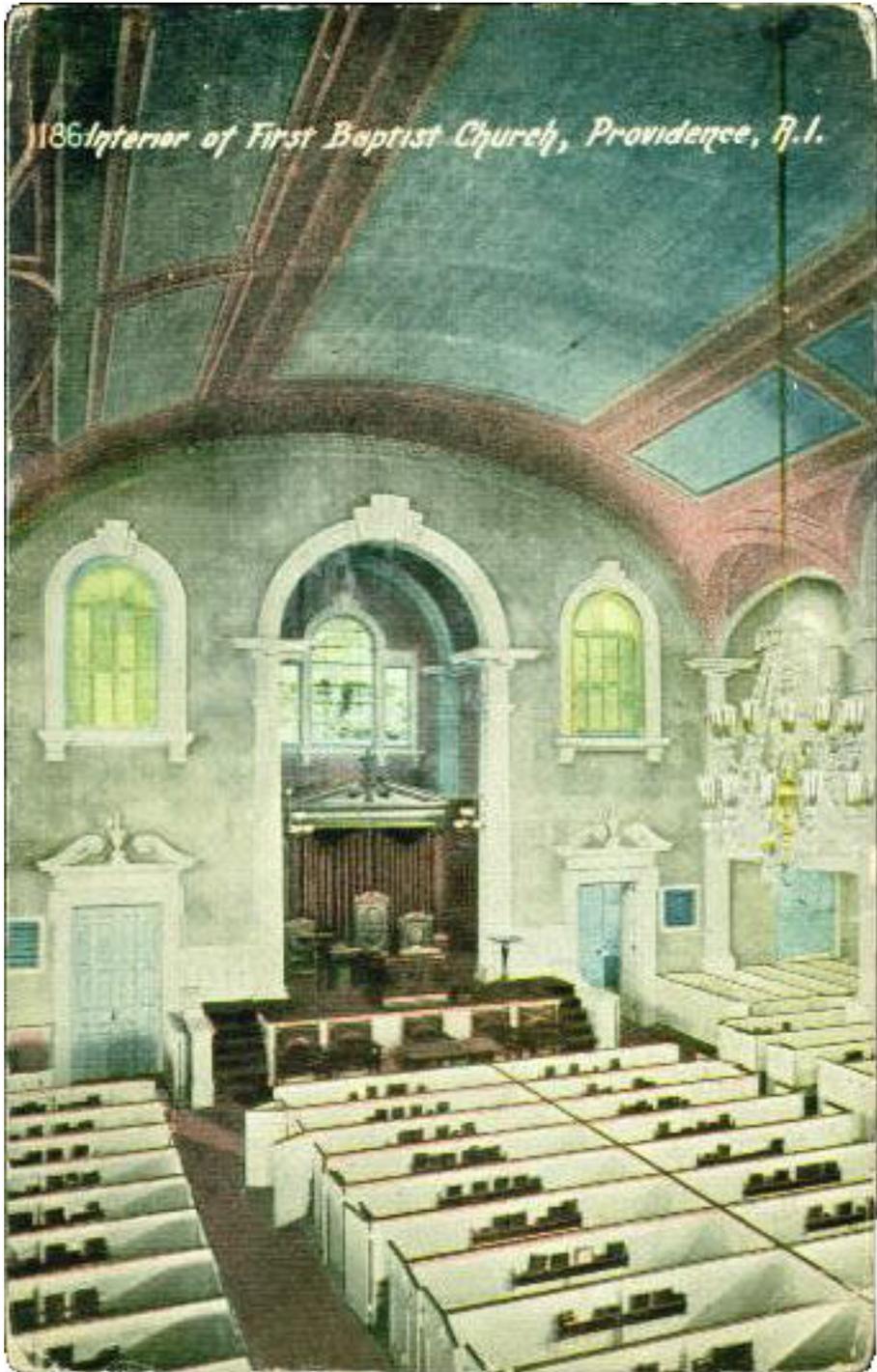
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April 28, Thursday: [Moses Brown](#) and Joseph Brown rode from [Providence](#) to Roxbury, near [Boston](#). In the following week Joseph would travel from there west to [Concord](#), to bring his brother [John Brown](#)'s situation to the attention of the influential American insurgents who were centering there, while Moses would attempt to persuade the British military officers in the port to release their prize prisoner. Meanwhile, Governor Wanton of [Rhode Island](#) wrote Captain James Wallace, urging John's release. The British captain, however, was recording in his diary that the sloops he had seized in the [Newport](#) harbor were filled with cargo "bound to Providence for the rebel army" — clearly, he intended that not only that contraband but also the vessels themselves were going to be forfeit, and that he was going to treat his captive as in rebellion against the monarch, and that this privateering booty was going to make his personal fortune.

THE BROWN BROTHERS

May 1, Sunday: The [Newport Mercury](#) reported the arrest of [John Brown](#):

Mr. Brown was sent off in one of the Packets, to be carried to Admiral Graves, at Boston, without having a single reason given for his being thus violently seized and carried out of this colony, contrary to all law, equity and justice.

RHODE ISLAND

At [Boston](#), [Moses Brown](#) was attempting to obtain his brother's release:



When Moses attempted to enter Boston on Monday, no arrangements had yet been made for passage into town. But Moses was pragmatic by nature and simply ignored what must have seemed an intractable impasse. he first located the officers in charge of the rebel army, explained his business, and obtained a permit to pass through the lines. At dusk, leading his horse by the reins, Moses ventured into the no-man's-land between the opposing forces on the Neck. Before him stood elaborate earthworks, burnished brass cannon, and scowling, red-coated sentries. Stepping toward the British position, he "sent in some of my letters and got the promise of return from some of the officers," as he recalled the episode in a letter years later. As the minutes passed, darkness fell on the Neck, and Moses realized he could no longer wait for an answer. He saw an officer decked out in gold braid and approached him from behind. It was a rash step, Moses recounted. "When he turned and saw me near he was so angry that he gave me such a blast as I never had or heard before." But Moses answered with an exercise of Quaker principles that seems borrowed from the annals of some Oriental martial discipline. "I stood and felt in a humble state of mind and as soon as he had left room for a word I replied to him in such a manner and with information of my message that he came down in mind as low as he was high before and in a very kind and gentle manner offered and did take a message." This was certainly an unusual adaptation of Quaker orthodoxy, but also a deliberate one. As Moses put it to Nicholas a week later, "I have seldom seen a patient, humble mind more needed nor more useful and as in proportion I have found this to be my state way



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was made for success." Indeed, moments after calming the officer he had startled at the fortified gate, Moses was escorted to a meeting with General Gage, becoming "the first man that entered Boston after the Lexington battle." ... In fact, Gage was being less than candid with Moses. The general had already decided to release John Brown, and wrote that day in a reply to Governor Wanton that "I don't ... see any reason for his detention." But he didn't mention that to Moses just yet, apparently hoping to use John's arrest as leverage to guarantee his cooperation. Instead, Gage scheduled another meeting for the next morning and dispatched a guard as an escort. Moses rode through the iron gates of Province House that night feeling optimistic for his brother's release, and for his peace plan as well.

May 2, Monday: At [Boston](#), [Moses Brown](#) continued to petition General Gage for his brother [John Brown](#)'s release — quite unaware that the British authority had already decided that he would not be held:



Moses returned the next day to find that John's ship had arrived at Boston harbor but that he remained a prisoner. Moses met with Gage, who regaled him with insights into the proceedings of the first Continental Congress, still in session at Philadelphia. Gage was clearly toying with him — possibly to better gauge his political leanings — for he still did not divulge his plans for John, and sent Moses to speak with Adm. Samuel Graves, where he got "a rather cool reception." ... The admiral sent Moses under escort onto a flat skiff that rowed out into the harbor and up to the imposing bulk of Graves's flagship, the new fifty-gun frigate *Preston*. Once aboard, Moses was led between decks, where he found his brother tearful and distraught. John had heard no good news and seen no friendly faces since his arrest six days before. Whatever distance there was between the brothers was erased in that instant. "He was glad to see me as he ever was," Moses wrote later. ... Armed with Oliver's statement [Peter Oliver, chief justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, a Tory], Moses hurried back through the besieged city for a return visit to Graves. "When I went next to the admiral he appeared in quite a different state," Moses recounted, "and very kindly sent an officer with me to his barge to bring my brother on shore." Before John's release, however, there was a final audience with General Gage. There, Gage and Moses executed a scheme the two had apparently devised in the course of their meetings: as a condition of John's release, both the Brown brothers were to sign a pledge that they would lobby the General Assembly in Rhode Island to intercede between the patriots in Massachusetts and the British forces in Boston.

This, of course, contradicted John's clear record as rebel activist and his strong inclination to resist the mandates of the crown. But it fit nicely with Moses's effort to derail a revolution that was still gathering steam, and he was glad to enlist Gage in forcing John to speak for moderation. For John,



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forced to choose between freedom and a trial for treason, this was an easy decision: he signed without protest. General Gage closed the deal with a flourish. He ordered that John's flour be returned to him along with an award for damages, that the *Abigail* and the *Diana* both be released from navy custody, and that Captain Wallace receive an official reprimand for arresting John Brown. Admiral Graves added a cheerful note, encouraging John to meet with Wallace personally to settle their differences, and the brothers were released that evening.

May 3, Tuesday: The brothers [Moses Brown](#), Joseph Brown, and [John Brown](#) had spent the night together at Roxbury. On this morning they set out for [Providence, Rhode Island](#). Joseph was riding one of the horses while John, he of the ample girth, was seated in the saddle of the other horse. Moses, of slighter build, had to perch astride that horse's buttocks:



John had to be thankful just to be at liberty. His luck had held, his brother had come through for him; he even had the saddle for the journey home. His stretch in custody was a harrowing one, shadowed by the prospect of an English jail or a noose. He'd spent a week at sea in irons, being forced to taste the hell that the new slaves experienced in the holds of his own Africa-trade ships. Now all that was behind him. He was back on his feet, with a full pardon in his pocket.

Moses, too, had reason to rejoice. He'd sprung his brother from dire circumstances, and done so on his own terms. There was no resort to arms, no exchanging prisoners of war. One of the tenets that had drawn Moses to the Quaker faith was its clear conviction that reason and truth would always reveal the proper course of action. Moses felt that America was being "Drove and Hurried with the Spirit of these Unhappy Times" and felt the only safe course was to resort to reasoned dialogue. In freeing John, he'd deployed his convictions like weapons, and slipped through enemy lines like a spirit. More than that, he'd won John's sworn pledge to join him on the side of moderation, and support an intervention that Moses believed could break the impasse at Boston and head off the insurrection. The calamity of war might yet be avoided.

How much they shared, and how much they kept to themselves, the brothers did not record, but their spirits were high when they arrived in the gloomy streets of Providence around eleven o'clock that night. They were greeted by the huzzas of a crowd that spilled out into the cool of the evening from the Golden Ball, Sabin's Tavern, and the other haunts along Main Street. As word spread of John's pardon and the reprimand to Wallace - though not of the oath signed by the brothers- they were hailed as patriot heroes.

THE BROWN BROTHERS



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May 4, Wednesday: The good news was out, in [Rhode Island](#), that the brothers [Moses Brown](#) and Joseph Brown were back from Massachusetts, and that somehow they had managed to bring the captured leading citizen [John Brown](#) home with them. The Reverend [Ezra Stiles](#) registered the news in his diary as "A humbling stroke for the Tories!"

THE BROWN BROTHERS

(Subsequent to these events, 16-year-old [Elkanah Watson](#) would become apprenticed to [John Brown](#).)

May 5, Thursday: In conformity with his conciliation agreement, [John Brown](#) addressed the General Assembly of [Rhode Island](#) in [Providence](#):



It was a remarkable oration, with John obviously torn between his inclinations and his obligations. Reasoned argument was always a strain for John, whose preferred approach was to plunge ahead, answering impulse with action and leaving rationales for later. Forced to lay out a considered strategy, he couldn't help but meander.

John opened his address on "the unnatural and unhappy contest between Britain and America" by declaring his "clear opinion ... that every colony on the continent are by the ties of honor justice and humanity obliged to stand and support each other in their just rights and privileges." Still, he argued for peace: "Although the sword has been drawn and the scabbard as yet seems to be lost, I am not out of hopes that the latter may be found and the former returned to its usual rest and quiet."

Pressing on, John picked a tortuous path around his own warlike disposition. "Although many are of the opinion that if this dispute must be determined by might and not by right that America can wish for no better time than the present, that we are united and have it in our power to blockade Boston in such a manner as the regular troops cannot march from thence to the country and that their situation there, living wholly on salt provisions, will be rendered so disagreeable, that better terms of peace may be obtained now than at any future time, but in my humble opinion we ought at the same time we are preparing for defense, to spare no pains in our endeavors for conciliating measures." To that end, John proposed sending a delegation to General Gage to plead for a truce that would "effectually put a total stop to any hostilities till the Continental Congress and each colony can consider an answer" to Lord Dartmouth's proposal on colonial taxation. Considering the time involved in orchestrating a full debate among the colonies, let alone getting word to England, John's scheme was patently ludicrous. But at least he was trying.

In closing, John asked the assembly, "Pray excuse this imperfect scrawl." But more important than the weakness of his argument was the fact that John Brown had made it at all. As the wealthiest merchant in Providence John enjoyed the status of a British lord, and he was already a hero of the days-old



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Revolution. After heated debate, and despite the bellicose mood of the assembly, John's appeal for peace carried the lower house, with Metcalfe Bowler casting the deciding vote. Moses went home that night satisfied that John had upheld his end of the bargain, but events soon eclipsed the brother's fragile truce. The upper house and Nicholas Cooke, the patriot who had replaced Governor Wanton, rejected any suggesting of intervening with Gage.

Charles Rappleye, in *SONS OF PROVIDENCE: THE BROWN BROTHERS, THE SLAVE TRADE, AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006, comments on page 330 in regard to what was going on here. The analysis is so simplistic that it is reductionist: "It was sibling rivalry on a grand scale." All this stuff we moderns think we believe about abolitionism being progressive and enslavement regressive is sheer irrelevance, for these black slaves and their anguish are mere stage props; what we have here is two white brothers "John and Mosie" taking center stage and chewing up the set scenery and relating to each other in the duke-it-out way that brothers relate to each other. "John was never going to cede to Moses the question of what was right and what was wrong."

June 6, Monday: Chaffing under the suggestion that he had, in advocating peace negotiations, "gone Tory," [John Brown](#) brought a lawsuit alleging damages in the amount of £10,000 against Captain James Wallace (of course this was mere bombast, since the British captain, being a commissioned officer under orders, was judgment-proof except in his monarch's own courts, and, being under the protection of his own cannon, was entirely unreachable).

June 12, Sunday: [John Brown](#) wrote to the Governor of [Rhode Island](#), Nicholas Cooke, suggesting that the colony use his ship, the [Katy](#), to attack British patrol ships in Narragansett Bay. The governor would approve and a crew of 80 men, with 10 cannon and 14 swivel guns, was readied for that vessel. Also fitted out was the *Washington*, a sloop of 6 guns.

The *Friendship*, captained by Thomas Jann, arrived in Philadelphia bringing 106 Scots immigrants, many of them indentured servants.



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Fall: The enslaved man Tom, along with his wife and their four young children, had been freed in May by order of the [Providence, Rhode Island](#) town meeting after their [slaveholder](#) owner, Jacob Schoemaker, had died there intestate. However, it came to appear that that town action had been premature: creditors from the island of Antigua in the Caribbean claimed this family as part of the Schoemaker estate there. If they had belonged to the estate rather than to the town of Providence, they could not be set free by the town, and still were slaves, and pertained to new white inheritors. The creditors wanted this New England town to return their property. Papers were served upon [John Brown](#) who left it to his brother [Nicholas Brown](#) to handle the matter. Nicholas consulted with brother [Moses Brown](#) and composed a letter of response.

[THE BROWN BROTHERS](#)

What these inheritors in Antigua were told was that “there is no getting possession of them without an expensive suit” which, at least in the case of the four minor children, would be unlikely to succeed before a New England jury. Nicholas intimated that his brother Moses had “told me lately, he would be at the expense of a lawsuit himself before they should be carried away to the West Indies as slaves.” He added (how truly or falsely not now known) “Brother John Brown much of the same way of thinking.”

[FREE PAPERS](#)

September 4, Thursday: At the age of 19, [Elkanah Watson](#) was entrusted to carry more than \$50,000 to [John Brown](#) and [Nicholas Brown](#) of [Providence, Rhode Island](#)’s agents in South Carolina and Georgia. With the money sewed into the linings of his garments, he would accomplish the journey of some 1,200 miles from Providence to Charleston in 70 days (along the way passing through Edenton, [North Carolina](#) on the Albemarle Sound near the Great Dismal Swamp, as well as through the state capital of New Bern).²³

November 13, Thursday: [Elkanah Watson](#) arrived in Charleston, South Carolina and delivered the funds of [John Brown](#) and [Nicholas Brown](#) of [Providence, Rhode Island](#) to their agent. Then he, with two companions, set out on a tour of exploration of other southern states (they would be dissuaded from entering Florida, which was still under British control).

23. \$50,000 then would be roughly equivalent to \$5,000,000 now. I would therefore presume that the funds were not in cash, but were instead in the form of large-denomination banknotes or letters of credit that would be rather difficult for a robber to benefit from.



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1775

June 12, Monday: The [Rhode Island](#) Assembly created the Rhode Island navy.

Joseph Brant, accompanied by Sir Guy Johnson and Colonel John Butler, addressed a council of 1,455 Iroquois at Oswego. Brant and the others explained the upcoming rebellion. The Oneidas under Steyawa refused to fight the colonial forces, but the other tribes prepare for possible war. Brant was appointed war chief, the 2d highest Iroquois office.



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June 15, Thursday: While serving as delegate to the 2d Continental Congress, George Washington was appointed commander in chief of American armed forces.

CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

The [Rhode Island](#) General Assembly ordered the local Committee of Safety to fit out two ships to defend the colony's shipping, and appointed a committee of three to obtain vessels. The new committee immediately chartered the sloop [Katy](#), that had been one of [John Brown](#) of [Providence](#)'s "negreros," and the sloop [Washington](#). The General Assembly appointed Abraham Whipple, who had won a certain amount of local recognition in the burning of the armed schooner HMS [Gaspee](#) in 1772, as the commander of the larger ship, [Katy](#), and as commodore of the two-ship fleet. At about 6PM, the [Katy](#), Captain Abraham Whipple (for whom Whipple Street in [Providence](#) would be named), and the [Washington](#), attacked a British patrol ship, the [Diana](#), off [Jamestown](#) on Conanicut Island in Narragansett Bay. When the powder chest of the British exploded, the crew beached their vessel just north of Jamestown and fled into the woods. The Americans seized the [Diana](#) and took it to [Providence, Rhode Island](#).

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June 25, Thursday: In [Providence, Rhode Island](#), the entire visiting patriot militia of [East Greenwich](#), the “Kentish Guards” under the command of James Mitchell Varnum, in their serge uniforms with scarlet facings and their tricorn headgear, at the invitation of [John Brown](#) observed the Sunday worship at the immense new 1st [Baptist Meeting House](#).

GO TO MASTER INDEX OF WARFARE

November: Late in the summer of [1775](#), General Washington’s troops besieging Boston had been so severe that they had no longer been able to fire their cannon. Had the British gone on the attack, the riflemen would not have had enough powder to resist them. Therefore the sloop [Katy](#) had been sent off in an abortive attempt to capture some powder from a British magazine on the island of Bermuda, although by the time the ship arrived, this powder had already been captured and was already on its way to Philadelphia. In this month, however, [John Brown](#) managed to bring ashore in [Rhode Island](#) a shipment of high-grade pistol powder obtained in Suriname, and, despite the fact that in October the powder had been selling at 4 s per pound, he offered it to General Washington in Cambridge at 6 s per pound –a rate the general described as “most exorbitant”– and dispatched Elkanah Watson with a guard of six men to convey the war material securely overland in a covered wagon.

ELKANAH WATSON



The war was still not declared, but already John had sold a ship to the new Rhode Island navy, and a cargo of gunpowder at a premium price. Practically overnight, John had become what is called in modern parlance a defense contractor.



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1776

GO TO MASTER INDEX OF WARFARE

January 8, Monday: People were



In January, 1776, [Concord](#) provided 20 blankets, Bedford 12, Acton 10, and Lincoln 14. In November, 1777, and at several other times, the town [Concord] voted to provide for the families of those engaged in the continental army. 1,210 pounds was paid for this purpose before September 1779.²⁴

In [Providence, Rhode Island](#), at a tavern on Towne (Main) Street, there was the 1st meeting of [Stephen Hopkins](#)'s committee to build frigates for the Continental navy. The committee included Governor Nicholas Cooke, [John Brown](#) and some other members of the Brown family, John Smith (this was an American John Smith, not the John Smith who in this year in London was whistling up the signature tune "To Anacreon in Heaven"), Jabez Bowen, Daniel Tillinghast, the brothers Joseph Russell and William Russell, and John Innes Clarke and Joseph Nightingale of the Clarke & Nightingale firm. The drinks that evening were on John Brown. The group would plan to build a warship of 32 guns, the *Warren*, and another warship of 28 guns, the [USS Providence](#).

24. [Lemuel Shattuck](#)'s 1835 [A HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF CONCORD;...](#) Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Company; Concord MA: [John Stacy](#)
(On or about November 11, 1837 [Henry Thoreau](#) would indicate a familiarity with the contents of at least pages 2-3 and 6-9 of this historical study.)



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August: The frigate *Warren* was built and fitted out in [Providence, Rhode Island](#) for the new American Navy. Together with a smaller sloop [USS Providence](#) (which had been [John Brown](#)'s square-topsail commercial sloop [Katy](#), but was refitted for a dozen four-pounder cannon and a crew of 90 as it became the 1st vessel in the US Navy), she would have a reasonably successful career.





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1777

February: Under the command of Lieutenant Jonathan Pitcher, the [USS Providence](#) ran the British blockade of the [Narragansett Bay](#). After putting into [New Bedford](#), the vessel cruised to Cape Breton and captured there a transport brig loaded with stores and carrying in addition to its crew two officers and 25 men of the British Army. Under command of Captain J.P. Rathbun, the USS *Providence* then would make two cruises on the coast.

Some sort of crazy influence battle was fought in [Rhode Island](#) over the issue of which was to come first, winning American freedom or making money off the revolutionary fighting. The battle was waged by proxies, and was ostensibly over whether obtaining crews of sailors for the Continental navy's publicly financed warships should have priority over obtaining crews of sailors for privately financed privateering expeditions, but eventually it became clear that attacks on [Esek Hopkins](#)'s loyalty to his nation had been being encouraged by the chauvinistic war profiteer [John Brown](#):



John's attack on Esek Hopkins marks him as a man of calculation and influence, and of overweening pride. With the frigate committee disbanded and his privateers returning a stream of riches, John might have contented himself to count his loot and enjoy the mounting problems confounding his grizzled old shipmaster. Instead he plotted, patiently, until he finally had the pieces in place to sabotage the one man in Rhode Island who had dared to cross him....

As the war progressed, many fortunes were lost in Providence and throughout America, but John only prospered. At the outset of the war he owned or shared interest in more than seventy-five ships, and while many were lost to the enemy -ten were seized in 1777 alone- John more than covered his losses with prize ships and returns from trade. Combined with earnings from the Hope Furnace and from his contracts with Congress, John managed to turn the war into a personal bonanza.

His phenomenal gains are evidenced by his investments. During the course of the war, John and his brother Nicholas banked heavily on securities issued by the states and by the Continental Congress. The prices of these bonds fluctuated wildly, but long experience trading in a variety of foreign currencies had honed their skills in arbitrage, and together the brothers amassed the largest single stake in government debt in Rhode Island. Around the same time, beginning in 1780, John went on a real-estate buying spree, purchasing a large waterfront tract on Aquidneck Island outside Newport and an eight-hundred-acre farm on Prudence Island. On the east shore of Narragansett Bay he obtained a lovely, grassy estate on a promontory near Bristol known by the Indian name Poppasquash, which he renamed Point Pleasant; on the west shore, he bought from the Greene clan five hundred well-watered acres at Namquit point south of Patuxet, overlooking the spit of land that had grounded the Gaspee a decade before. This he dubbed Spring Green Farm, and it alternated with Point Pleasant as a summer retreat for the



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family.

Most of the properties John obtained were bargains. Some of the estates were confiscated from Tory sympathizers -the farm on Prudence Island formerly belonged to Joseph Wanton- and were resold at a discount by the wartime government. And farmland valuations were especially low. But John had had ample cash reserves to skim the cream off the depressed market. There is little question that, by the end of the Revolution, John had emerged as the richest man in Rhode Island.



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1782

November 23, Saturday: The politicians of [Rhode Island](#) had been resisting the funding of the new federal government of the United States of America. They had, for instance, refused to join in imposing a continental duty upon imports. The 1st of [Thomas Paine](#)'s "Six Letters to Rhode Island" arguing the necessity of such funding, "In Answer To the Citizen of Rhode Island / On the Five Per Cent. Duty," appeared in the [Providence Gazette](#). Paine criticized the Rhode Islanders for their unwillingness to work within the federal union and to contribute their fair share to the conduct of the revolution. He feared that England was going to monopolize American commerce through the subornation of disunity among the states of the new union.

December 7, Saturday: [John Brown](#) of [Providence, Rhode Island](#) explained everything we need to know about himself: "Before I was seven years old I knew what property was and consequently what a despicable figure I myself and my children after me would cut without a share thereof."

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The “Meeting for Sufferings” committee of the New England [Yearly Meeting](#) of the [Religious Society of Friends](#), with Friend [Moses Brown](#) acting as clerk of that committee, noted that £134 was lying around in their education kitty and decided to bite the bullet and create a Yearly Meeting School. They considered [Providence](#), [Portsmouth](#), and [East Greenwich](#) in [Rhode Island](#), and Lynn in Massachusetts, and settled on Portsmouth because they were offered the use of a room in the local Friends meetinghouse together with the rental income from a number of house lots that Rhode Island Quarterly Meeting owned in [Newport](#). Friend Isaac Lawton there could be the schoolmaster at an annual salary of £75, and local families were volunteering to provide room and board for as many as 30 young scholars.



[John Brown](#) of [Providence](#), [Rhode Island](#) provided half the funds for a “compleat Philosophical Apparatus and Library” of science at the [College of Rhode Island](#) — clearly they were able to take a “philosophical” *pecunia-non-olet* attitude, at the time, toward the fact that such moneys arose at least in part from the international vending of human beings, both between Africa and America (the international trade in new



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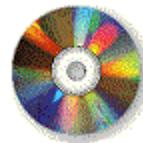
[slaves](#)) and from region to region along the American coast (local resale of used slaves).



Here is an example of the local resale of used slaves mentioned above (something that we seldom take into consideration when thinking about these issues), a local resale practice that would be allowed to continue unimpeded even after the "[international slave trade](#)" and its dread Middle Passage had been benevolently interdicted. In this year, a white widow of Warren, [Rhode Island](#), Roby Luther Whitting, was having difficulties with her [slave](#) lad Fantee. She had leased her property to Edward Jones of [Providence](#) on May 22, 1782 to be used for a period of one year, but Jones had been dissatisfied with Fantee's labor and also dissatisfied with Fantee's general attitude. In a letter to the widow on January 17, 1783 he asked to be paid damages, alleging that the boy had been guilty of "every vice under the sun," vices unspecified. In this situation, Fantee escaped, was recaptured and imprisoned, and was then returned in disgrace in irons to the widow in [Warren](#). The slavemistress, at her wit's end, on February 6, 1783 entrusted her black, "about Eighteen or Twenty Years Old a Healthy Active Lad," to Isaac Gorham of the *Patty* to be sold in the West Indies, to be taught a lesson he wouldn't forget by being gradually worked to death in the cane fields. (On the voyage thither, Captain Gorham's sloop would be intercepted by a British warship and lucky Fantee would find himself confiscated as contraband.)



"It is simply crazy that there should ever have come into being a world with such a sin in it, in which a man is set apart because of his color – the superficial fact about a human being. Who could **want** such a world? For an American fighting for his love of country, that the last hope of earth should from its beginning have swallowed [slavery](#), is an irony so withering, a justice so intimate in its rebuke of pride, as to measure only with God."



– Stanley Cavell, *MUST WE MEAN WHAT WE SAY?*
1976, page 141

January 18, Saturday: The 5th of [Thomas Paine](#)'s "Six Letters to [Rhode Island](#)," arguing the necessity of funding for the new federal government of the United States of America, appeared in the [Providence Gazette](#). By this point Paine had been in Providence long enough to begin to suspect the motivation of his opponents (whom he did not name), and wrote about this suspect motivation, accusing them of self-interest and a lack of patriotism. The persons he was attacking included [John Brown](#) and [Nicholas Brown](#) and they of course knew it:

The objectors to the measure, not choosing to begin the question where it ought to be begun, have formed into an ambushade to



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attack it in disguise ... this ambuscade consists originally of about ten or a dozen merchants, who have self-interest in the matter, and who, with a very profitable trade pay very little taxes in proportion ... and who likewise, by their present opposition, are drawing themselves away from the common burdens of the country, and throwing themselves upon the shoulders of others. And this, forsooth, they call patriotism.... Be ashamed, gentlemen, to put off the payment of your just debts, the payment of your suffering army, and the support of your national honor, upon such illiberal and unbelieved pretenses.

THE BROWN BROTHERS

January 31, Friday: [Thomas Paine](#) wrote the 6th of his "Six Letters to [Rhode Island](#)," arguing the necessity of funding for the new federal government of the United States of America (it would appear in the [Providence Gazette](#) on February 1st).

THE BROWN BROTHERS

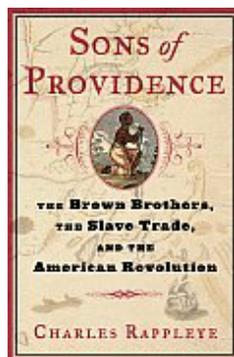
February 1, Saturday: The 6th of [Thomas Paine](#)'s "Six Letters to [Rhode Island](#)," arguing the necessity of funding for the new federal government of the United States of America, appeared in the [Providence Gazette](#). He reacted to the criticisms that had been levied against him by his local critics, criticisms such as that he had once declared bankruptcy, and that he had a fondness for alcoholic beverages:

I have heard a great deal of the angry dislike of a few men, whose niggardly souls, governed only by the hope of the high price which their next or present cargoes may bring.

Charles Rappleye has commented on this, in his *SONS OF PROVIDENCE: THE BROWN BROTHERS, THE SLAVE TRADE, AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006, page 221):

... almost single-handedly, at a critical juncture in the life of the new nation, [John Brown](#) had derailed the momentum for establishing a central government and thrown the faltering federal leadership into disarray.

THE BROWN BROTHERS

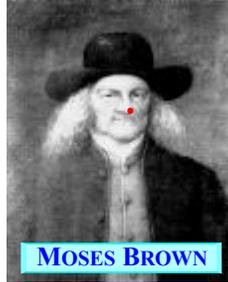




JOHN “OLDTHUNDER” BROWN

JOHN “OLDTHUNDER” BROWN

October 1, Wednesday: This being the year in which [Moses Brown](#), a brother to the wealthy [Providence](#) businessmen [Nicholas Brown](#) and [John Brown](#) who engaged in the [international slave trade](#) but a convert to [Quakerism](#), was becoming an elder in his monthly meeting of the [Religious Society of Friends](#) and beginning his campaign to end [Rhode Island](#)'s involvement in human slavery,²⁵ one might be tempted to leap to the presumption that such



a campaign must obviously have been a righteous Quakerly protest against lay racism, motivated by religious egalitarianism — but before we leap to such a conclusion we must consider something which happened on this particular day of the year: In the case of Abigail Franks, the young woman of mixed race who had applied for membership in the [Religious Society of Friends](#), the [Yearly Meeting](#) decided that:

The request of Chester Quarter last year respecting the application of a woman to Concord Monthly Meeting to be received into membership, and which was referred for further consideration to this or a future meeting being now revived, the subject opening with weight, it is the sense and judgment of the meeting that Concord Monthly Meeting may safely consider the application of the person on the same ground in common with other applications for admission into membership.

Although these minutes testify only to “weighty and edifying deliberations and a spirit of condescension,” “a weighty exercise,” and “diverse just observations,” mentioning no doubt or objection, it is clear that there had been such — because there is on record a personal letter from a friend of the applicant who afterward commented “the mountains of opposition are leveled before her.”²⁶

No way was this going to be easy! There was still a great spirit of racism to be overcome!

25. There were five slaves in the Brown family mansion on College Hill in [Providence](#), and [Moses Brown](#) helped them work up the courage to steal themselves away.

26. The data elements for this series on the acceptability of persons of mixed race as Quakers are from Henry Cadbury's “Negro Membership in the Society of Friends” in [The Journal of Negro History](#), Volume 21 (1936), pages 151-213.

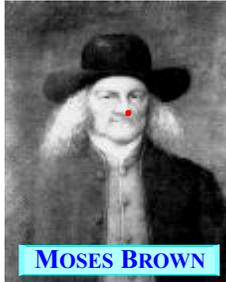


JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

1784

February 25, Wednesday: The General Assembly of [Rhode Island](#) took up [Friend Moses Brown](#)'s bill for the abolition of [slavery](#). Not only would Rhode Island's slaves be gradually [manumitted](#), beginning with all children born



MOSES BROWN



after the 1st of March, but also, no resident of the state might participate in the [international slave trade](#), and every shipowner fitting out his ship for African ports would be required to post bond that slaves would be no part of his ship's cargo.

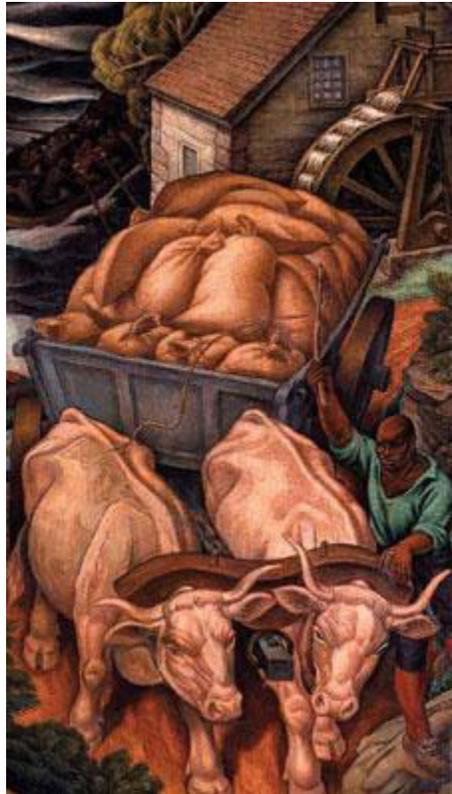
"An Act authorizing the manumission of negroes, mulattoes, and others, and for the gradual abolition of slavery." Persons born after March, 1784, to be free. Bill framed pursuant to a petition of Quakers. COLONIAL RECORDS, X. 7-8; Arnold, HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND, II. 503.



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The statute included a provision releasing slavemasters who manumitted slaves born prior to 1784 between 21 and 30 years of age (for a male) or 18 and 30 (for a female) from further obligation to financially support the freed slaves, but only when their town council was confident that the freed slave was healthy enough not to become dependent on town aid.



His brother [John Brown](#) was opposed, pointing out that if white people were not charitable enough to buy these black victims along the coast of Africa, very often the black victims of African wars would simply be offed. One Benson, a veteran of the trade, supplied the assembly with supporting anecdotes. The Middle Passage was portrayed as a rescue.

[Esek Hopkins](#) pointed out that these [Quakers](#) who opposed [slavery](#) were mere hypocrites, who readily participated in the rum industry, the sugar industry, the indigo industry, and other segments of the economy that relied heavily upon slave labor. These self-righteous posturers were as implicated as anybody else.

A more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon has come to us recently from Professor Joanne Pope Melish:



The support provisions of the 1784 emancipation law allowed slave owners to escape any further financial responsibility for slaves under forty years of age whom they [manumitted](#), which threatened to leave too many "old" slaves in their thirties to the support of the towns. A 1785 revision ["An Act repealing Part of the Act respecting the Manumission of Slaves," RI General Assembly, October 1785], reiterated in 1798 ["An Act relative to Slaves, and to their Manumission and Support: part



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of the revision of the Public Laws of the State of Rhode-island and Providence Plantations," RI General Assembly, January 1798], lowered the age of eligibility for unencumbered emancipation to thirty. Apparently some town councils, faced with rising costs for pauper support, refused to allow slave owners to manumit even eligible slaves, leading to the passage of an 1804 act providing for an appeal procedure by slave owners "aggrieved" by recalcitrant councils ["An Act in Amendment of the Act, entitled, 'An Act relative to Slaves, and their Manumission and Support,'" RI General Assembly, March 1804]. In other words, an aging slave population that would not be replenished either by birth into slavery or by importation, which had been outlawed in Rhode Island in 1774, presented an increasing financial liability, and many slave owners sought to manumit their slaves before they would be obligated to support them in their old age. The large number of manumissions may have led the slaves themselves to interpret these provisions as the "General Emancipation" act that Brown describes. Undoubtedly most slaves saw freedom under any circumstances as good news – though not all did, as Brown wryly observes, noting that a few "declared their masters had been eating their flesh and now they were going to stick to them and suck their bones."

At the first federal census in 1790, there were 427 free people of color and 48 slaves living in the city of Providence, a city of about 6,400. By 1810, four years before William Brown was born, the number of free people of color had risen to 865, just about 8.6 percent of the population of about 10,000, and the number of slaves had fallen to 6. Yet there were still 5 slaves in Rhode Island and 1 in the city of Providence in 1840, according to the Fifth Federal Census, and it was only the new state Constitution of November 1842 that finally abolished slavery entirely in Rhode Island.



JOHN “OLDTHUNDER” BROWN

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1786

The [John Brown](#) edifice, a massive monument to human comfort which would be described by President John Quincy Adams as “the most magnificent and elegant private mansion that I have ever seen on this continent,” was being erected on Benefit Street in [Providence](#). Some in [Rhode Island](#) were referring to this rotund little person as “the Providence Colossus.” However, things were not so financially easy for him as they might have seemed, for a codfishing business in which he had been investing was not generating the expected profits — and he was therefore contemplating a re-entry into the [international slave trade](#).

W.E. Burghardt Du Bois: In 1760 England, the chief slave-trading nation, was sending on an average to Africa 163 ships annually, with a tonnage of 18,000 tons, carrying exports to the value of £163,818. Only about twenty of these ships regularly returned to England. Most of them carried slaves to the West Indies, and returned laden with sugar and other products. Thus may be formed some idea of the size and importance of the slave-trade at that time, although for a complete view we must add to this the trade under the French, Portuguese, Dutch, and Americans. The trade fell off somewhat toward 1770, but was flourishing again when the Revolution brought a sharp and serious check upon it, bringing down the number of English slavers, clearing, from 167 in 1774 to 28 in 1779, and the tonnage from 17,218 to 3,475 tons. After the war the trade gradually recovered, and by 1786 had reached nearly its former extent. In 1783 the British West Indies received 16,208 Negroes from Africa, and by 1787 the importation had increased to 21,023. In this latter year it was estimated that the British were taking annually from Africa 38,000 slaves; the French, 20,000; the Portuguese, 10,000; the Dutch and Danes, 6,000; a total of 74,000. Manchester alone sent £180,000 annually in goods to Africa in exchange for Negroes.²⁷

September: A codfishing business in which [John Brown](#) had invested had not been returning the expected profits, so he had sent out a vessel to engage in the [international slave trade](#). In this month that vessel returned and he had to face the fact that not only had he lost half his cargo of 70 slaves this time, but also, his captain and his first mate were no longer alive.

Fall: [John Brown](#)'s previous effort in the [international slave trade](#) in this year having failed at the loss of half of a cargo of 70 slaves, plus the captain and first mate — Brown began fitting out another negro to send off to the Guinea coast of Africa.

27. These figures are from the REPORT OF THE LORDS OF THE COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL, etc. (London, 1789).



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November 27, Wednesday: In the afternoon, in Rhode Island, as [John Brown](#) was sitting down to a meal, Friend [Moses Brown](#)'s son Obadiah showed up with a package in hand. The boy was carrying a written argument opposing this new family involvement, and also a recent pamphlet arguing for the abolition of the [international slave trade](#).

The [Baptist](#) brother would provide the [Quaker](#) brother with a categorical defense of his personal righteousness. This was his story and he was sticking to it:

[T]he slaves are positively better off that is brought from the coast than those that are left behind.

Besides, everyone else was doing it! The morality of his position having thus been demonstrated, John went on to confess that there was, in addition, a practical consideration — it is appropriate for a businessman to pay his debts:

I owe an enormous sum of money in Europe, and am striving in every trade which appears lawful and right to me, to pay as much of that debt as possible.

Meanwhile, in Massachusetts, a party of Shays' Rebellion insurrectionaries led by Oliver Parker arrived in [Concord](#), intending to march on the following day to Cambridge and there prevent a sitting of the Court of Common Pleas. Captain Job Shattuck passed through town in secret. The plan would fall apart, and then the dispersed insurrectionaries would be individually tracked down and taken into custody.



On the 28th of November the Court of Common Pleas was to sit in Cambridge; and though the leading insurgent of the 12th of September had been persuaded not to take any measure in opposition to government, his agreement was overruled in secret council with the leaders in Worcester county. On the 27th a party, headed by Oliver Parker marched to Concord, intending to proceed to Cambridge. Job Shattuck came in a secret manner; and after his arrival, went under cover of night, "to Weston to get intelligence of the Worcester forces; but though they had begun their march, they did not appear; and from want of cooperation the whole plan fell through. The insurgents at Concord, growing disheartened, scattered before any force could reach them." Warrants were issued for apprehending the leading insurgents in Middlesex, and were committed to the sheriff. A military force volunteered to assist him, leaving [Boston](#) the 29th of November, and proceeding immediately to Concord. The militia of Concord stood ready to afford any assistance. A party of horse was despatched to secure the subjects of the warrants, and returned at night with Page and Parker prisoners. Not having succeeded



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in apprehending Shattuck - the principal leader, they proceeded to his house in Groton, and on their arrival found he had taken the alarm and fled to the woods. A search was made and after considerable exertion he was taken about 10 o'clock, a.m., November 30th. He received several wounds from his pursuers during his arrest, some of which were very dangerous, - a treatment which was generally censured. He was taken to Boston the next day and confined to prison where he received medical aid but he never entirely recovered the use of his limbs. In the following May he was tried at Concord, and condemned to be hanged. But the government treated him with leniency, as they did all those who unfortunately acted, as he did from mistaken views, and gave him a full pardon September 20, 1787.²⁸ Ephraim Wood, Esq. obtained this pardon from the government. After the apprehension of the opposing leaders in Middlesex, the insurrection was confined to other counties. Detachments of soldiers were made in January to suppress it. One from [Concord](#) marched to Worcester, Springfield, Hadley, Amherst, Petersham, back to Amherst, Hadley, [Northampton](#), Westhampton, Pittsfield, Farmington, Loudon, Sandersfield, Southwick, West-Springfield, back to Worcester and home. The officers of this company were Roger Brown, Captain; Amos Barrett, Lieutenant; and Jonas Heald of Acton, Ensign, and were attached to the regiment commanded by Colonel Henry Woods, of Pepperell, and Lieutenant Colonel William Monroe, of Lexington. They left Concord, January 19th, and returned February 26th. On the 27th of January, the town voted "to provide the families of those soldiers that were gone with the necessaries of life, while absent, if asked for." A bounty was paid by subscription. All the militia marched as far as Marlborough; but, before they had been long absent, they were ordered back again. The people of this town took no further part in the insurrection.²⁹

28. Captain Job Shattuck died in Groton, January 13, 1819, aged 84 years. He had been a brave and successful officer in the French and Revolutionary Wars, and often affirmed that he looked on no act of his life with more satisfaction, than that to which I have adverted; though he is said to have felt grateful for the pardon at the time, and remarked, he "would always be a good subject afterward." Whatever the object of those acts might originally have been, the ultimate results were undoubtedly good. The people were thereby taught the necessity of a general union of the states, and of the speedy adoption of the federal constitution. They were induced to take such measures as gave the people confidence in the government and promoted the general posterity.

29. [Lemuel Shattuck's 1835 A HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF CONCORD;...](#) Boston MA: Russell, Odiorne, and Company; Concord MA: John Stacy, 1835

(On or about November 11, 1837 [Henry Thoreau](#) would indicate a familiarity with the contents of at least pages 2-3 and 6-9 of this historical study.)



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

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1787

Doctor William Thornton proposed that he lead a body of free black [Rhode Island](#) and Massachusetts colonists to somewhere along the west coast of Africa. (A year later Doctor Thornton would seem to be in communication with the Reverend Samuel Hopkins in regard to such a scheme, but eventually the resettlement effort would need to be abandoned, of course for want of funds.)

As part of what, in Massachusetts, was being termed "Shays' Rebellion, there was an overt act of defiance in [Rhode Island](#). A group of citizens styling themselves "Reformation men," living near what would later be known as the Phillips place, organized to resist state taxation. When a state officer appeared with deputies, to round up and herd off and "distrain" their farm livestock to the extent of unpaid taxes, they chased after the officers and cattle, overtaking them as they were crossing the bridge to the northeast of Pascoag village, and beyond this bridge, in a dense wood, chased off the deputies and rescued their livestock. The next day the officers returned and seized suspects, taking them to [Chepachet](#) for trial. A mob invaded the court-room and carried away the prisoners. Judge Steere, who lived nearby, rode to alert [Providence](#). Governor Arthur Fenner sent word that if the struggle came to an immediate halt, nothing further would be done to collect these back taxes or capture the citizens. Essentially, this tax revolt succeeded.

READ EDWARD FIELD TEXT

In this year [John Brown](#)'s nine years of service in the General Assembly of [Rhode Island](#) came to an end. Meanwhile his ship, the *General George Washington*, sailed from [Providence](#) for Canton in South China, captained by Jonathan Donnison. She was the 1st of our trading ships to trade with the Orient. The tiniest state of the union was going to open the giant nation of [China](#) to the West:

Hail, realm of rogues, renowned for fraud and guile,
All hail, the knaveries of yon little isle...
Look through the state, the unhallowed ground appears
A nest of dragons and a cave for bears...
The wiser race ...
Like Lot from Sodom, from Rhode Island run.

— "To Rhode Island," 1787, anonymous

1787. The first ship, from this State, sailed for Canton - the General Washington, Captain Jonathan Donnison. The number of vessels in this port, then, exceeded that of New York, being 110, and the tonnage 10,590.



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

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1789

During this year, 5 black male domestic servants would slip away from the John Brown mansion and its associated workshops, going to [Boston](#) and attempting to merge into the free black community. Three of these 5 men, facing destitution, would soon return to [slavery](#) in [Providence](#), [Rhode Island](#), promising their slavemaster [John Brown](#) that they would "behave better" in the future.

CONSTITUTION OF A SOCIETY FOR ABOLISHING THE SLAVE-TRADE. WITH SEVERAL ACTS OF THE LEGISLATURES OF THE STATES OF MASSACHUSETTS, CONNECTICUT AND [RHODE-ISLAND](#), FOR THAT PURPOSE. Printed by John Carter. [Providence](#), 1789.

INTERNATIONAL SLAVE TRADE

June 28, Sunday: Abigail Adams, traveling to join Vice President John Adams in New-York and passing through [Providence](#), [Rhode Island](#), attended a dinner party at the [John Brown](#) mansion. (She would describe the edifice as "one of the grandest I have seen in the country.")³⁰

30. Abigail would not have been distressed at seeing black slaves in the mansion, since she considered blacks to be inherently inferior to white people, and naturally enslaved.



JOHN “OLDTHUNDER” BROWN

JOHN “OLDTHUNDER” BROWN

1790

February 28, Sunday: John Adams confided to fellow-Federalist [John Brown](#) that he was “really much affected by the obstinate infatuation of so great a part of the people of [Rhode Island](#),” which had not yet had the common sense to ratify [the US Constitution](#).



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

1791

Colonel Timothy Pickering, Canandaigua lawyer Thomas Morris, the Reverend Kirkland, Horatio Jones, and Jasper Parrish negotiated with native headmen Red Jacket, Cornplanter, and Good Peter (the Indian preacher) and local tribes at New Town point (Elmira, New York). Nearly 500 Senecas encamped at Friend's Landing on Seneca Lake. At the request of Good Peter, "Universal Friend" [Jemimah Wilkinson](#) made an appearance. Her topic was "Have We Not All One Father?" Good Peter's sermon following her sermon, "Universal Friend" requested that his words be interpreted. Good Peter declined to provide this interpretation, commenting succinctly "if she is Christ, she knows what I said."

Following this conference, a delegation of Seneca headmen set out to visit President George Washington at the nation's capital, Philadelphia.

Noting "the great advantages which had resulted to Boston from the bank established there," [Moses Brown](#) and [John Brown](#) helped a group of wealthy merchants found, and John served as the chief executive officer, and Moses served as a director of, the first bank in [Rhode Island](#), incorporated in [Providence](#) and named the "Providence." (During June 1865 this institution would be reorganized as a national bank and renamed the "Providence National Bank.")

Four guys – [Samuel Slater](#), and a woodworker, and an elderly black employee of the merchant [Moses Brown](#), and the ironmaster [David Wilkinson](#) of Slater Mill in [Pawtucket](#) (meaning "waterfall") near North Providence, – bankrolled by a 5th guy, said Friend Moses, and using the water power of the [Blackstone River](#), with children working his "spinning jennies" in the production of yarn made of [cotton](#) from slave plantations, were at this point able to begin the farming out the large quantities of manufactured yarn to local women who were to work in their homes for piecework wages, weaving this yarn into cloth on consignment. The English thread-spinning technology had been duplicated entirely from Slater's memory.

This mill would begin to operate satisfactorily as soon as they had made a correction in the slope of the carder teeth he had specified.

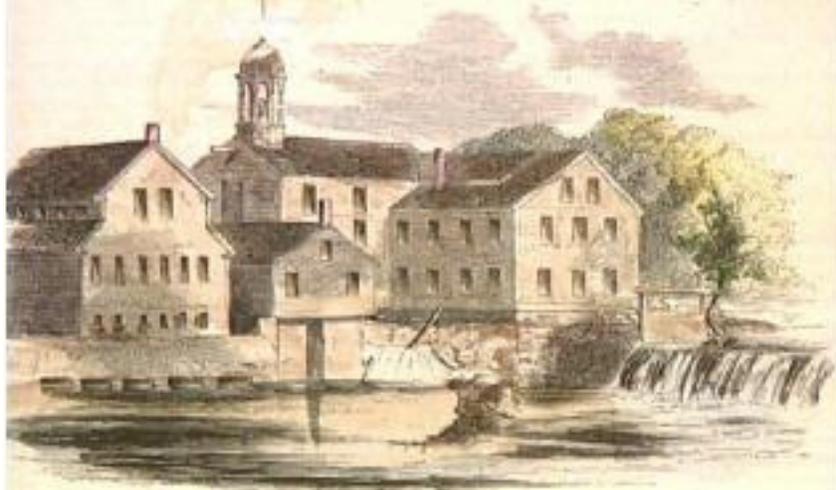




JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

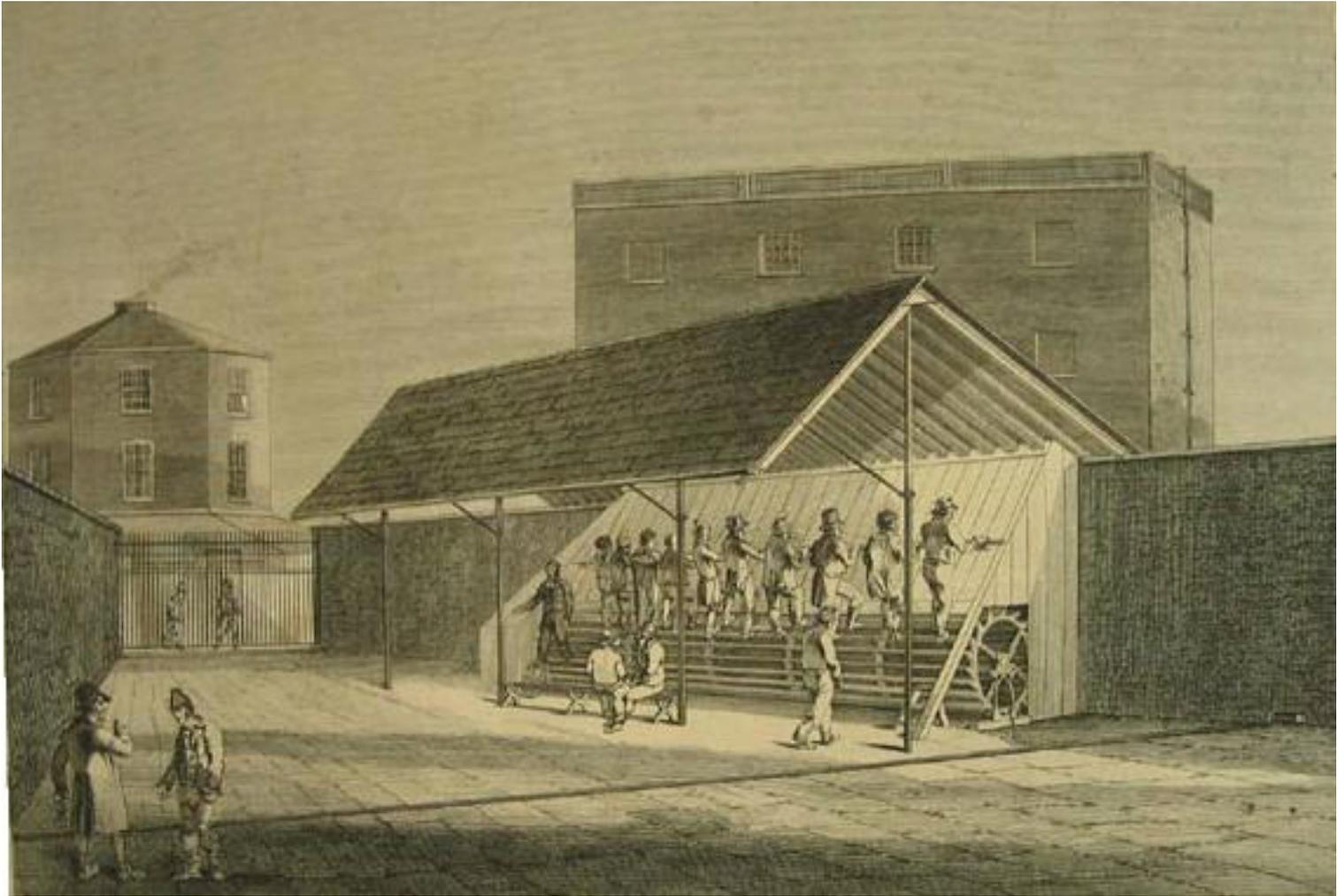
(Obviously, our Bill of Rights was arriving, in this former colony that had been the very last to ratify the Constitution, not one instant too soon. :-)



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Water power would replace at least for the most part the brute labor that had been being provided by animal and human treadmills:



(The treadmill illustrated above was one in use for punishment at the Brixton House of Correction in 1821. Prisoners walked the treadmill for ten minutes and then had a five minute breather. Talking was forbidden. Although the treadmill at Coldbath Fields prison drove a flour-mill, in other prisons the power produced was not utilized. Of course, in factories the treadmill was not for punishment and the power was always utilized.)



JOHN “OLDTHUNDER” BROWN

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Mr. [Samuel Slater](#) was able to get his hands on eight children between the ages of 7 and 12 as his first work crew in his factory at Slater Mills, to tend his water-powered carding and spinning machines — machines which were utterly lacking in any safety guards over their power belts and pulleys. Clearly, the only families which would put their children to this sort of dangerous labor were families which were desperate to get food on their table and shelter over their heads. Get this, such children might otherwise be destitute and victimizable! Slater made no agreements that these children, who should have been in school, would be trained as apprentices in any craft: they were not indentured to learn a lifetime skill, but were to be mere low-wage machine fodder without a future, in his dark Satanic mill. You can visit this mill today. It's right off the freeway but now it is deceptively lovely and lonely and silent there. There is nothing whatever about the place which might cause child abuse to spring to one's mind.

Get ready, here comes the unholy alliance of “the lords of the lash and the lords of the loom”!
By 1810 the United States would boast 87 such cotton mills, able to provide employment for 4,000 workers, some 3,500 of whom would be women and children who might otherwise be destitute and victimizable.³¹

We owe so much to technology and the profit motive! (Don't let Adam Smith's invisible hand slap you in the face. :-)

White imitation slaves are infinitely superior to black real ones, because there's never any agitation to [emancipate](#) the imitation white ones — if they get old or sick or get caught in the machinery and injure themselves, you can just tell them to get lost!

By 1796 there would be three forges, a tanning mill, three snuff mills, an oil mill, a clothiers works, three fulling mills and two nail mills, at this falls on the [Pawtucket](#) River, all being run by water power rather than muscle power. Human workers were being allowed to use their brains rather than their brawn — isn't that superior?

31. As [Friend Moses Brown, Rhode Island](#)'s premiere industrialist, had pointed out,

“As the manufactory of the mill yarn is done by children from 8 to 14 years old it is a near total saving of labor to the country.”



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

1795

August: [John Brown](#) of [Providence](#) conspired with Captain Peleg Wood of [Newport](#) to inject another [Rhode Island negrero](#) vessel into the [international slave trade](#).



November: In August [John Brown](#) had conspired with Captain Peleg Wood to inject another [negrero](#) vessel into the [international slave trade](#). This had turned out to be the *Hope*, an old square-rigger, fitted out in [Providence](#). The ship's mission was to load a cargo of human beings along the Slave Coast and dispose of them for a large profit in the barracoons of Havana, Cuba, and not in secret — thus testing the [Rhode Island](#) law that had recently rendered this sort of activity very illegal.



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

1796

In [John Brown's Rhode Island](#) trial for [slave-trading](#), he was found "not guilty." This would persuade many that against the wealthy and powerful who engage in such practices legislation, and the system of courts, are impotent.

INTERNATIONAL SLAVE TRADE



However, such legislation was not being considered impotent in [Maryland](#), for in this year that state apparently had the idea that they would be able to get people to obey a law against certain types of importation of slaves.

"An Act relating to Negroes, and to repeal the acts of assembly therein mentioned."

"*Be it enacted* . . . , That it shall not be lawful, from and after the passing of this act, to import or bring into this state, by land or water, any negro, mulatto or other slave, for sale, or to reside within this state; and any person brought into this state as a slave contrary to this act, if a slave before, shall thereupon immediately cease to be the property of the person or persons so importing or bringing such slave within this state, and shall be free."

§ 2. Any citizen of the United States, coming into the State to take up *bona fide* residence, may bring with him, or within one year import, any slave which was his property at the time of removal, "which slaves, or the mother of which slaves, shall have been a resident of the United States, or some one of them, three whole years next preceding such removal."

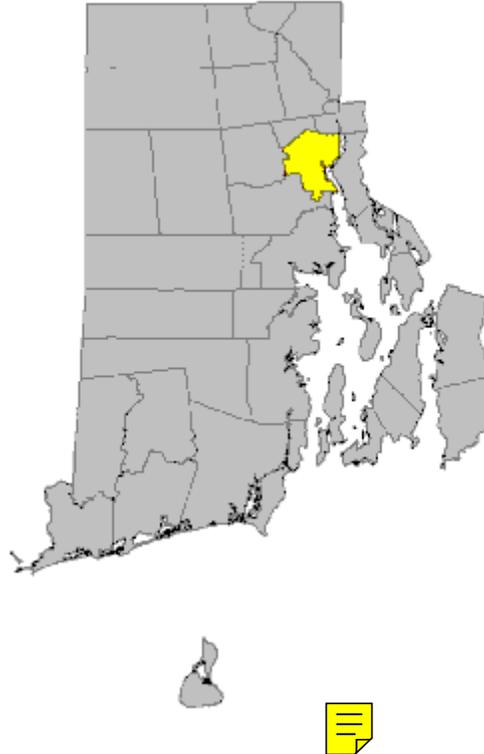
§ 3. Such slaves cannot be sold within three years, except by will, etc. In 1797, "A Supplementary Act," etc., slightly amended the preceding, allowing guardians, executors, etc., to import the slaves of the estate. *Dorsey, LAWS, I. 334, 344.*



JOHN “OLDTHUNDER” BROWN

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In [Providence](#), [John Brown](#) took Thomas Poynton Ives as a partner. The firm of Brown and Ives would become world famous. One of their ventures would be the very successful trading ship *Ann and Hope* (named for their wives).



Late in the year: Captain Peleg Wood brought [John Brown](#)'s [negrero Hope](#) back to [Rhode Island](#) after a successful voyage in which he had brought a cargo of newly enslaved human beings from the coast of Africa to the barracoons of Havana, Cuba. A new law had just forbidden Rhode Islanders from any participation in the [international slave trade](#), and Captain Wood's son was overheard to comment that [Newport](#) slavetraders were eagerly awaiting the outcome of this “experiment ... to try the strength of the law.”

W.E. Burghardt Du Bois: Meantime, in spite of the prohibitory State laws, the African slave-trade to the United States continued to flourish. It was notorious that New England traders carried on a large traffic.³² Members stated on the floor of the House that “it was much to be regretted that the severe and pointed statute against the slave trade had been so little regarded. In defiance of its forbiddance and its penalties, it was well known that citizens and vessels of the United States were still engaged in that traffic.... In various parts of the nation, outfits were made for slave-voyages, without secrecy, shame, or apprehension.... Countenanced by their fellow-citizens at home, who were as ready to buy as they themselves were to collect and to bring to market, they approached our Southern harbors and inlets, and clandestinely disembarked the sooty offspring of the Eastern, upon the ill fated soil of the Western hemisphere. In this way, it had been computed that,

32. Cf. Fowler, LOCAL LAW IN MASSACHUSETTS AND CONNECTICUT, etc., page 126.



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during the last twelve months, twenty thousand enslaved negroes had been transported from Guinea, and, by smuggling, added to the plantation stock of Georgia and South Carolina. So little respect seems to have been paid to the existing prohibitory statute, that it may almost be considered as disregarded by common consent."³³

These voyages were generally made under the flag of a foreign nation, and often the vessel was sold in a foreign port to escape confiscation. South Carolina's own Congressman confessed that although the State had prohibited the trade since 1788, she "was unable to enforce" her laws. "With navigable rivers running into the heart of it," said he, "it was impossible, with our means, to prevent our Eastern brethren, who, in some parts of the Union, in defiance of the authority of the General Government, have been engaged in this trade, from introducing them into the country. The law was completely evaded, and, for the last year or two [1802-3], Africans were introduced into the country in numbers little short, I believe, of what they would have been had the trade been a legal one."³⁴ The same tale undoubtedly might have been told of Georgia.

33. Speech of S.L. Mitchell of New York, Feb. 14, 1804: ANNALS OF CONGRESS, 8th Congress, 1st Session, page 1000. Cf. also speech of Bedinger: ANNALS OF CONGRESS, pages 997-8.

34. Speech of Lowndes in the House, Feb. 14, 1804: ANNALS OF CONGRESS, 8th Congress,, 1st Session, page 992. Cf. Stanton's speech later: ANNALS OF CONGRESS, 9th Congress, 2d Session, page 240.



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

1797

August 5, Monday: There was a preliminary appearance in federal court in [Providence, Rhode Island](#) on this day, in preparation for the trial of [John Brown](#) on charge of being engaged in the [international slave trade](#).

Per Jay Coughtry, Associate Professor of History at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas:

On August 5, 1797, [John Brown](#), the premier merchant and first citizen of [Providence, Rhode Island](#), reluctantly entered federal district court in his hometown and became the first American to be tried under the U.S. Slave Trade Act of 1794. After months of out-of-court wrangling with the plaintiffs, officers of a state abolition society, it appeared that Brown would now stand trial for fitting out his ship *Hope* for the African [slave trade](#). The voyage had concluded profitably in Havana, Cuba, with the sale of 229 [slaves](#) a year earlier.³⁵

Brown's accusers included his younger brother, [Moses](#), a tireless opponent of both slavery and the slave trade since his conversion, on the eve of the American Revolution, from the family's [Baptist](#) faith to the [Society of Friends](#). A founding member and officer of the Abolition Society, chartered in 1789, [Moses Brown](#) had been fighting Rhode Island slave traders, including brother John, for a decade, since the passage of the largely ineffective state statute of 1787 that prohibited the trade to state residents.³⁶

In this instance, the society's traditional tactic -cajoling a pledge from the accused to forswear slaving in the future in exchange for dropping the suit- had failed. Even so, as Moses had pointedly reminded John before trial, the charges thus far were limited, involving only the comparatively mild first section of the three-year-old federal statute. A conviction would therefore require nothing more than forfeiture of the vessel, an aging one at that. What John should most fear, Moses advised, were "larger prosecutions" should he further provoke the Abolition Society by refusing to settle out of court.³⁷

Ultimately, the elder Brown ignored his brother's mediation efforts and offered only an eleventh hour plea for a continuance to haggle over milder pledge terms. Its patience exhausted, the Abolition Society flatly rejected that ploy whereupon the case proceeded swiftly to trial. As predicted, the district court judge had little choice but to assent to the arguments and evidence in the prosecution's narrowly defined case. Consequently, [John Brown](#) lost his vessel at a local auction in late August, thereby closing the forfeiture case. When the

35. Jay Coughtry, *THE NOTORIOUS TRIANGLE: RHODE ISLAND AND THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE* (Philadelphia, 1981), pages 214-215.

36. *NOTORIOUS TRIANGLE*, chapter 6. See also Mack Thompson, *MOSES BROWN: RELUCTANT REFORMER* (Chapel Hill, 1962), pages 175-190.

37. [Moses Brown](#) to [John Brown](#), March 15, 1797, *MOSES BROWN PAPERS*, vol. 9, no. 29, Rhode Island Historical Society; [Moses Brown](#) to [John Brown](#), *ibid.*, vol. 9, no. 32.



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Abolition Society again sought Brown's promise to abandon his African commerce, he refused, quickly prompting the "larger prosecutions" Moses had warned him about.³⁸

Meanwhile, Moses had become suspicious of John's continuing recalcitrance. It seemed premeditated in his younger brother's view, perhaps a deliberate strategy devised by John's "friends at [Newport](#)" (i.e., slave traders) to guarantee further suits over the illegal sale of the slaves. Such litigation, while potentially more costly, would also require a jury trial, and the slave traders assumed that local juries would not convict one of their own. They were right. Within six months [John Brown](#) announced his court victory over the "Wicked and Abominable Combination I mean the Abolition Society."³⁹

This insiders' view of the foregoing case of the ship *Hope* is documented, along with numerous other key prosecutions, in the correspondence of John and especially Moses Brown, now available in this microfilm series, PAPERS OF THE AMERICAN SLAVE TRADE: SELECTIONS FROM THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY. Moreover, Moses Brown's letters reveal not only the Abolition Society's formal legal stratagems but also its traditional policy of intense but informal negotiating with slave traders who often yielded to the group's demands without a court fight. Cyprian Sterry, for example, the principal slave trader in Providence during the 1790s with fifteen voyages to the African coast in 1794 alone, fully succumbed to the society's persistent pressure. He escaped prosecution (along with his captain, Samuel Packard) for an African voyage involving the ship *Ann* by signing a written pledge to leave the [slave trade](#) forever.⁴⁰

Despite occasional successes in and out of court, in general the campaign against the slave traders in the wake of federal prohibition was proceeding haltingly at best. Moses Brown continued to monitor the efforts of customs officials in the Rhode Island district for the Abolition Society, which increasingly relinquished its early prosecutorial role to the U.S. Attorney's office. Congress bolstered the federal district attorney's legal arsenal with amendments to the 1794 statute in 1800 and again in 1803. Meanwhile, an aggressive secretary of the treasury appointed a special prosecutor for the district in 1801. The new laws closed the most obvious loopholes in the original act while the appointment of a resident special prosecutor provided a full-time federal agent who could focus exclusively on the escalating volume of vessels clearing state ports for Africa.⁴¹

Documentation for these events not only reveals the growing docket of slaver cases but also regularly exposes the personal and political dimensions of enforcement and evasion. By

38. [John Brown](#) to [Moses Brown](#), July 29, 31, 1797, [MOSES BROWN](#) PAPERS, vol. 9. nos. 43 and 44, Rhode Island Historical Society. See also NOTORIOUS TRIANGLE at 215.

39. [John Brown](#) to [Moses Brown](#), July 31, 1797, [MOSES BROWN](#) PAPERS, vol. 9, no. 44, Rhode Island Historical Society and Moses Brown to [John Brown](#), November 17, 1797, *ibid.*, vol. 9, no. 49; [John Brown](#) to James Brown, June 21, 1798, [John Brown](#) Papers, box D, Rhode Island Historical Society

40. [John Brown](#) to [Moses Brown](#), [MOSES BROWN](#) PAPERS, vol. 9, no. 43. See also NOTORIOUS TRIANGLE at 213-214.

41. NOTORIOUS TRIANGLE at 216-222.



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century's end, for example, it had become clear that slavers had rendered nearly null the local auctions designed to separate owners from their slaving vessels. African merchants and their influential supporters simply intimidated all potential bidders and then repurchased their ships for a fraction of their assessed value. To end such bogus sales-at-auction, the government in 1799 sent Samuel Bosworth, surveyor of the port of [Bristol](#), to bid for the D'Wolf family's recently condemned schooner *Lucy*. Twice within twenty-four hours of the scheduled sale, [John Brown](#) and two D'Wolf brothers, the country's largest slave traders, visited Bosworth at home to dissuade him from his duty. Despite a threatened dunking in [Bristol](#) harbor, Bosworth "with considerable fear and trembling" arrived at the wharf on auction morning where he was met by a party of local "Indians" in unconvincing native garb and with faces blackened. No [Bristol](#) version of the patriotic tea party ensued, fortunately. Instead, Bosworth's captors hustled him aboard a waiting sailboat and deposited him two miles down the bay at the foot of Mount Hope. The government never employed that strategy again.⁴² Such an outrage was not the limit of "the trade's supporters" arrogance, however. Soon, Special Prosecutor John Leonard would personally feel the wrath of Rhode Island's African merchants. Even his limited success in libeling several of their vessels under the anemic section one was enough to prompt an attack on his person. They apparently feared that Leonard's February 1801 victory in prosecuting a D'Wolf captain caught redhanded by a U.S. Navy cruiser would set a costly precedent. Consequently, several overzealous supporters of the [slave trade](#) assaulted Leonard on the steps of the federal courthouse in Washington.⁴³ Even [John Brown](#) thought this response somewhat extreme, especially as he was then involved in concocting a federal legislative solution to his slaving constituents' problem. During the hectic months between Thomas Jefferson's election and inauguration as president, Brown successfully spearheaded a move in Congress to create a separate customs district for the port of [Bristol](#). Following passage of the requisite legislation late in February 1801 and the eventual appointment of customs officers amenable to the slave traders' needs, the effort to stop the [slave trade](#) in the courts permanently stalled. The end of Rhode Island participation in illegal African commerce would begin only years later with the implementation of the Anti-Slave Trade Act of 1807 on January 1, 1808. This now constitutional statute outlawed all foreign slave trading by American citizens in any capacity. By the time violations of this new law carried the death penalty in 1819, Rhode Islanders, along with other New Englanders, had found new markets for their commerce and textile factories for their surplus capital. The brief revival of the slave trade in clipper ships of the antebellum era from ports such as Baltimore would proceed without them.⁴⁴

42. Samuel Bosworth to Oliver Wolcott, August 1799, Shepley Papers, vol. 9, no. 8, Rhode Island Historical Society; Jonathan Russell to Albert Gallatin, March 18, 1804, *ibid.*, vol. 9, no. 7. George Howe tells the tale of the *Lucy* in his MOUNT HOPE: A NEW ENGLAND CHRONICLE (New York, 1959), 107-108.

43. [John Brown](#) to Benjamin Bourn, February 1801, Peck MSS, vol. 11, no. 66, Rhode Island Historical Society.

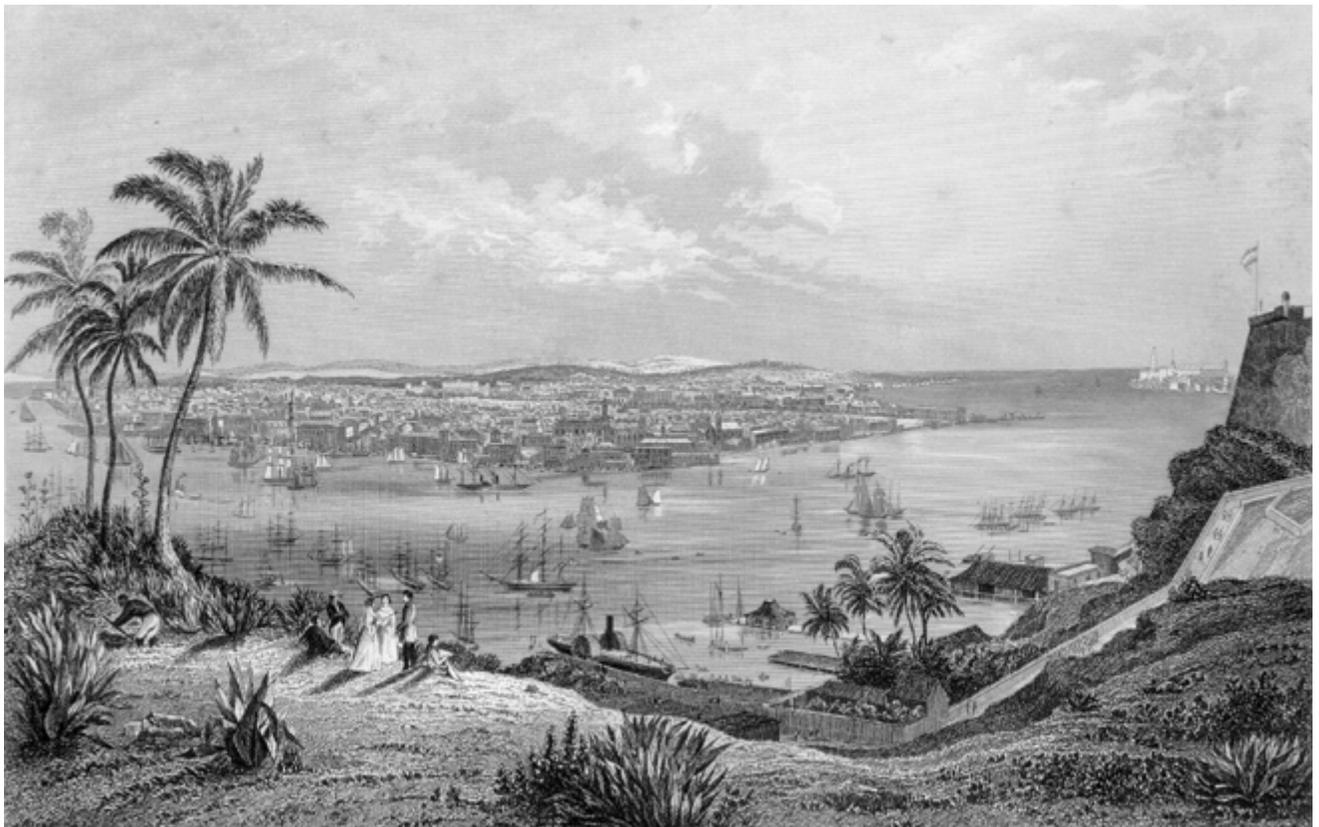


JOHN “OLDTHUNDER” BROWN

JOHN “OLDTHUNDER” BROWN

October 5, Thursday: [John Gardner Wilkinson](#) was born in Little Missenden, Buckinghamshire, a son of a Westmoreland clergyman, the Reverend John Wilkinson, an amateur enthusiast for antiquities. Both parents would soon die, and the child would inherit a modest income.

[Baptist](#) businessman [John Brown](#) of [Providence](#) became on this day the 1st American to go on trial in a federal district court under the first section of the US Slave Trade Act of 1794, for sending out his old ship *Hope* in the [African slave trade](#). Brown had fitted out his ship *Hope* as a negrero, and a year earlier it had brought a cargo of 229 new [slaves](#) to Havana, Cuba.



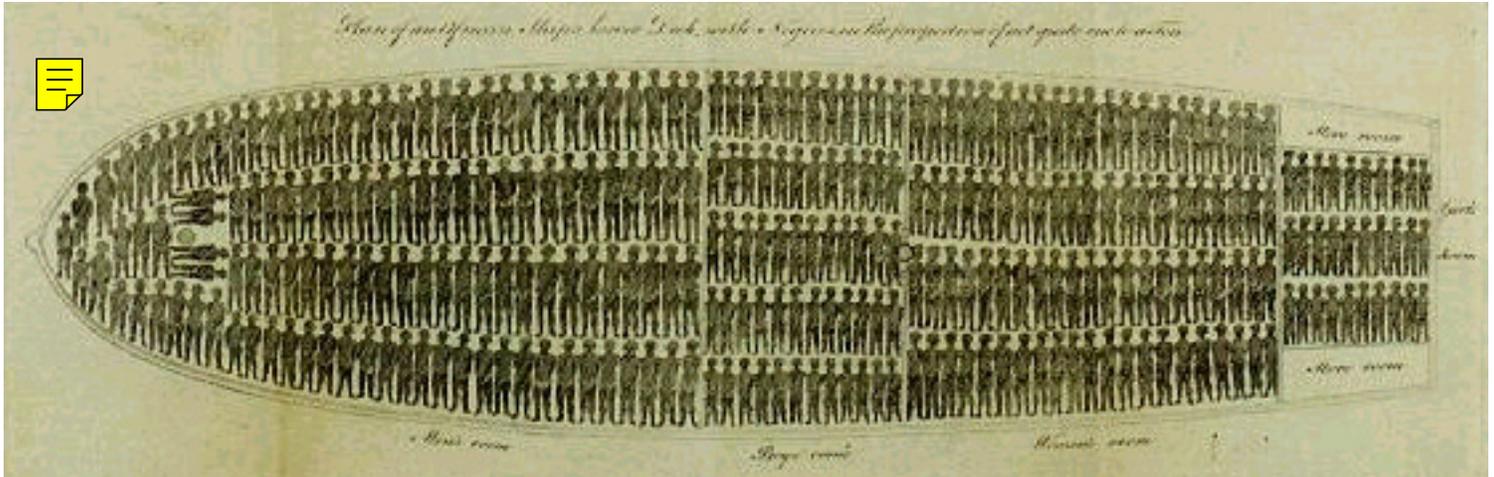
Accusers included Brown’s younger brother [Friend Moses Brown](#), who had become a tireless opponent of both [enslavement](#) and the [international slave trade](#) since his conversion from the family’s [Baptist](#) faith to the

44. [John Brown](#) to James D’Wolf and Shearjashub Bourn (n.d. but 1800), [JOHN BROWN PAPERS](#), Rhode Island Historical Society; [John Brown](#) to Shearjashub Bourn, February 1801, Peck MSS, box 11, no. 66, Rhode Island Historical Society. The full story of the separate district issue and the eventual end of slave trading from [Rhode Island](#) is detailed in NOTORIOUS TRIANGLE at 225-229 and 233-237.

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[Religious Society of Friends](#). A founding member and officer of the Abolition Society chartered in 1789, Friend Moses had been fighting his state's slave traders, including his own brother, during the decade that had elapsed since the passage in 1787 of a largely ineffective state statute that had prohibited the trade to residents of [Rhode Island](#).



The penalty, if the case was lost, would be comparatively mild: no jail time, merely the confiscation of the *Hope*, since any more substantial penalty would necessitate a jury trial and there was no reasonable expectation that a local jury would convict their prominent fellow citizen. (In fact no American slave trader would meet with the death penalty for engaging in the [international slave trade](#) until the initial year of our civil war, and even then, only exactly one-count-'em-one such American slave trader would ever actually be hanged by the neck until dead — isn't history interesting?)

W.E. Burghardt Du Bois: Of the twenty years from 1787 to 1807 it can only be said that they were, on the whole, a period of disappointment so far as the suppression of the slave-trade was concerned. Fear, interest, and philanthropy united for a time in an effort which bade fair to suppress the trade; then the real weakness of the constitutional compromise appeared, and the interests of the few overcame the fears and the humanity of the many.



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

1798

From this year into 1800, the US would be engaged in an undeclared naval war with France. This contest would include land actions, such as that of the city of Puerto Plata in the Dominican Republic, at which our marines would capture a French [privateer](#) under the guns of the harbor's forts.

CONSULT THE DOCUMENTS

US MILITARY INTERVENTIONS

According to Frederick C. Leiner's *MILLIONS FOR DEFENSE: THE SUBSCRIPTION WARSHIPS OF 1798* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999), as the summer approached, the USA seemed on the verge of open war with France.⁴⁵ "Egged on" by the exposure of the XYZ Affair as well as by "galling seizures of merchant ships," the merchants and shipmasters of Newburyport began to discuss among themselves "what action they could take to help the country," and began to solicit funds among themselves to construct, for the use of the United States Navy, a 20-gun warship to be named the *Merrimack*, for which their Moses Brown (that is, not the Quaker Moses Brown) would serve as captain. Before this frenzy was over, ten port towns up and down the coast would have not only pledged funds but also begun the construction of such warships. The idea was to hunt down the French [privateers](#) and to convoy with American merchant vessels both along the Atlantic coast and in Caribbean waters. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania would have begun the *Philadelphia*, a 44-gun ship for which Stephen Decatur was to be the captain (note, this is not at all the same ship as that monstrous boondoggle, the first USS *Pennsylvania* launched in 1836), [Baltimore, Maryland](#) would have begun the *Maryland* and the *Patapsco*, 18-gun ships for which John Rogers and Henry Geddes were to be the captains, Boston, Massachusetts would have begun the *Boston*, a 24-gun ship for which George Little was to be the captain, Norfolk, Virginia would have begun the *Richmond*, a 16-gun ship for which Samuel Barron was to be the captain, New-York, New York would have begun the *New York*, a 36-gun ship for which Richard V. Morris was to be the captain, Salem, Massachusetts (?) would have begun the *Essex*, a 32-gun ship for which Edward Preble was to be the captain, and Charleston, South Carolina would have begun the *John Adams*, a 20-gun ship for which George Cross was to be the captain. The federal Senate would initiate a bill to purchase such gunships from the subscribers using 6% certificates of obligation, and that bill would be signed into law by the end of June before even the first keel had been laid. In addition to these eight subscription ships, the *George Washington*, an 24-gun ship commanded by Patrick Fletcher that was already five years old, would be sold to the US Navy by [John Brown](#) of [Providence, Rhode Island](#) in exchange for some of these 6% certificates.

45. Alexander DeConde, *THE QUASI-WAR: THE POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY OF THE UNDECLARED WAR WITH FRANCE 1797-1801* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966)



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

1799

The [Rhode Island](#) brigantine *Orange* (or is this a typographic error in regard to a voyage in 1779?) brought a cargo of 120 new [slaves](#) from the coast of Africa.

[William Ellery](#) seized the [DeWolf](#) schooner *Lucy* (Captain Charles Collins) for engaging in the slave trade and put it up for auction in [Bristol](#). Local surveyor Samuel Bosworth was appointed to bid on the vessel on behalf of the government. After [John Brown](#) of [Providence](#) and several other slavers had attempted unsuccessfully to intimidate Bosworth, the DeWolfs simply hired thugs who, costumed as native Americans, kidnapped him and took him several miles up the bay while with a trifling bid the DeWolfs recovered their vessel.

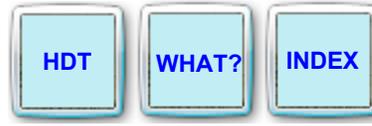
[John Brown](#), as ever a strong defender of the absolute righteousness of the [international slave trade](#), was elected to the US House of Representatives. He would sponsor legislation to create a separate Customs House in [Bristol](#), in facilitation of the international slave trade that was still being conducted through that port by [James DeWolf](#) and Shearjashub Bourne.



The DeWolf Crest

W.E. Burghardt Du Bois: Meantime, in spite of the prohibitory State laws, the African slave-trade to the United States continued to flourish. It was notorious that New England traders carried on a large traffic.⁴⁶ Members stated on the floor of the House that "it was much to be regretted that the severe and pointed statute against the slave trade had been so little regarded. In defiance of its forbiddance and its penalties, it was well known that citizens and vessels of the United States were still engaged in that traffic.... In various parts of the nation, outfits were made for slave-voyages, without secrecy, shame, or apprehension.... Countenanced by their fellow-citizens at home, who were as ready to buy as they themselves were to collect and to bring to market, they approached our Southern harbors and inlets, and clandestinely disembarked the

46. Cf. Fowler, LOCAL LAW IN MASSACHUSETTS AND CONNECTICUT, etc., page 126.



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JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

sooty offspring of the Eastern, upon the ill fated soil of the Western hemisphere. In this way, it had been computed that, during the last twelve months, twenty thousand enslaved negroes had been transported from Guinea, and, by smuggling, added to the plantation stock of Georgia and South Carolina. So little respect seems to have been paid to the existing prohibitory statute, that it may almost be considered as disregarded by common consent."⁴⁷

These voyages were generally made under the flag of a foreign nation, and often the vessel was sold in a foreign port to escape confiscation. South Carolina's own Congressman confessed that although the State had prohibited the trade since 1788, she "was unable to enforce" her laws. "With navigable rivers running into the heart of it," said he, "it was impossible, with our means, to prevent our Eastern brethren, who, in some parts of the Union, in defiance of the authority of the General Government, have been engaged in this trade, from introducing them into the country. The law was completely evaded, and, for the last year or two [1802-3], Africans were introduced into the country in numbers little short, I believe, of what they would have been had the trade been a legal one."⁴⁸ The same tale undoubtedly might have been told of Georgia.

47. Speech of S.L. Mitchell of New York, Feb. 14, 1804: ANNALS OF CONGRESS, 8th Congress, 1st Session, page 1000. Cf. also speech of Bedinger: ANNALS OF CONGRESS, pages 997-8.

48. Speech of Lowndes in the House, Feb. 14, 1804: ANNALS OF CONGRESS, 8th Congress,, 1st Session, page 992. Cf. Stanton's speech later: ANNALS OF CONGRESS, 9th Congress, 2d Session, page 240.



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

1800



February 23, Sunday: [William Jardine](#) was born at Edinburgh, Scotland. He would be educated at home to the age of 15.

The active enforcement of the [Rhode Island](#) law against slavetrading by abolitionist customs collector [William Ellery](#) so infuriated new congressman [John Brown](#), a slavetrader, that he had sponsored a federal bill to split off a customs district separate from [Newport](#), to have its headquarters in [Bristol](#). The Congress therefore on this day authorized a separate new customs house. The letter is predated by one month, and the obvious inferences that a historian can derive from this factoid are that this deal had gone down in secrecy, and that there were some concerned individuals who had not yet learned of it. This might not sound at all remarkable, but there is background information that makes it remarkable indeed, in connecting the establishment of this new federal customs house in Bristol **with the continuation of the trans-Atlantic trade in new [slaves](#)**. Here (within blue boxes, on following screens) is this background:

TRIANGULAR TRADE



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

1799

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Taking into account this history that lies hidden behind the Act of February 23, 1800, it is interesting what would happen **next**. Next, Jonathan Russell would be appointed as 1st US customs collector at the new [Bristol](#), [Rhode Island](#) customs house, and Russell would continue to enforce the law against the [international slave trade](#) in the manner in which it had been being enforced while the [Newport](#) customs house was still running the show. Because of this, the [DeWolf](#) family would need to circulate a petition for his removal, and conduct a lobbying campaign in Washington DC. The result would be that in February 1804, President [Thomas Jefferson](#) would fire Jonathan Russell, replacing him with a more cooperative official, a brother-in-law of [James DeWolf](#) who had a major investment in the international slave trade. This man, Charles Collins, would serve as collector at the new Bristol customs house, **and ignore the law at presidential behest and succor the international slave trade at presidential behest, until 1820:**



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

1804

➡ February: The first customs collector for [Bristol, Rhode Island](#), Jonathan Russell, had been constantly interfering with the [international slave trade](#) in strict application and implementation of official US federal law and policy. The [DeWolfs](#) and the other slave trading families of Bristol therefore arranged with President [Thomas Jefferson](#) to have Russell replaced with a brother-in-law of theirs, Charles Collins, who was captain of one of that family's negrero vessels — a man who could be counted on to not enforce the federal law against the importation of generations of fresh [slaves](#) from Africa into the United States of America.



The DeWolf Crest

W.E. Burghardt Du Bois: Of the twenty years from 1787 to 1807 it can only be said that they were, on the whole, a period of disappointment so far as the suppression of the slave-trade was concerned. Fear, interest, and philanthropy united for a time in an effort which bade fair to suppress the trade; then the real weakness of the constitutional compromise appeared, and the interests of the few overcame the fears and the humanity of the many.

➡ May 10, Saturday: The United States Senate and House of Representatives approved An Act in Addition to the Act intituled "An Act to Prohibit the Carrying on of the [Slave](#) Trade from the United States to any Foreign Place or Country."⁴⁹

"An Act in addition to the act intituled 'An act to prohibit the carrying on the Slave Trade from the United States to any foreign place or country.'"⁵⁰

INTERNATIONAL SLAVE TRADE



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

W.E. Burghardt Du Bois: In the next Congress, the sixth, another petition threw the House into paroxysms of slavery debate. Waln of Pennsylvania presented the petition of certain free colored men of Pennsylvania praying for a revision of the slave-trade laws and of the fugitive-slave law, and for prospective emancipation.⁵¹ Waln moved the reference of this memorial to a committee already appointed on the revision of the loosely drawn and poorly enforced Act of 1794.⁵² Rutledge of South Carolina immediately arose. He opposed the motion, saying, that these petitions were continually coming in and stirring up discord; that it was a good thing the Negroes were in slavery; and that already "too much of this new-fangled French philosophy of liberty and equality" had found its way among them. Others defended the right of petition, and declared that none wished Congress to exceed its powers. [John Brown](#) of [Rhode Island](#), a new figure in Congress, a man of distinguished services and from a well-known family, boldly set forth the commercial philosophy of his State. "We want money," said he, "we want a navy; we ought therefore to use the means to obtain it. We ought to go farther than has yet been proposed, and repeal the bills in question altogether, for why should we see Great Britain getting all the slave trade to themselves; why may not our country be enriched by that lucrative traffic? There would not be a slave the more sold, but we should derive the benefits by importing from Africa as well as that nation." Waln, in reply, contended that they should look into "the slave trade, much of which was still carrying on from Rhode Island, Boston and Pennsylvania." Hill of North Carolina called the House back from this general discussion to the petition in question, and, while willing to remedy any existing defect in the Act of 1794, hoped the petition would not be received. Dana of Connecticut declared that the paper "contained nothing but a farrago of the French metaphysics of liberty and equality;" and that "it was likely to produce some of the dreadful scenes of St. Domingo." The next day Rutledge again warned the House against even discussing the matter, as "very serious, nay, dreadful effects, must be the inevitable consequence." He held up the most lurid pictures of the fatuity of the French Convention in listening to the overtures of the "three emissaries from St. Domingo," and thus

49. Exportation of slaves was of course a completely separate issue from importation of slaves. In the Constitutional Convention, it had been proposed by a committee of eleven to protect the importation of slaves to the year 1800, but Mr. Pinckney moved to extend the time at least until the year 1808. This motion was carried — New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, voting in the affirmative; and New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, in the negative. In opposition to the motion, Mr. Madison said: "Twenty years will produce all the mischief that can be apprehended from the liberty to import slaves; so long a term will be more dishonorable to the American character than to say nothing about it in the Constitution." The provision in regard to the slave trade shows clearly that Congress considered [slavery](#) a State institution, to be continued and regulated by its individual sovereignty; and to conciliate that interest, the slave trade was continued 20 years, not as a general measure, but for the "benefit of such States as shall think proper to encourage it." This temporary protection had extended only to importation, and the constitutional document had not extended any similar protection to exportation.

50. STATUTES AT LARGE, II. 70. For proceedings in Congress, see SENATE JOURNAL (reprint of 1821), 6th Congress, 1st session, III. 72, 77, 88, 92.

51. ANNALS OF CONGRESS, 6th Congress, 1st Session, page 229.

52. Dec. 12, 1799: HOUSE JOURNAL (reprinted 1826), 6th Congress, 1st Session, III. 535. For the debate, see ANNALS OF CONGRESS, 6th Congress, 1st Session, pages 230-45.



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1789

July 31, Friday: The federal Congress created the United States Custom Service, as a new branch of the Treasury Department.

1790

June 14, Monday: The federal Congress created the [Rhode Island](#) custom districts of [Providence](#) and [Newport](#). These two districts handled all ship traffic connecting with nine Rhode Island ports, in the Providence district, [Providence](#) and [Pawtuxet](#), and, in the Newport district, [Newport](#), [North Kingstown](#), [East Greenwich](#), [Westerly](#), [Bristol](#), [Warren](#), and Barrington.

READ EDWARD FIELD TEXT

1794

[Friend Moses Brown](#) and [Friend](#) Samuel Rodman presented to President George Washington and Vice-President John Adams a memorial in opposition to the [international slave trade](#). The federal Congress passed an act prohibiting the trans-Atlantic trade. (When officials of the [Newport](#) customs district would begin to enforce this law in the subsidiary port of [Bristol](#), this would interfere with the nefarious activities of [Rhode Island](#) slavetraders [James DeWolf](#) and Shearjashub Bourne. The [slavetraders](#) would lobby the government for the establishment of Bristol as a separate customs district and no longer subject to these out-of-control officials of the Newport customs district — who were actually daring to enforce this new law.)

W.E. Burghardt Du Bois: Of the twenty years from 1787 to 1807 it can only be said that they were, on the whole, a period of disappointment so far as the suppression of the slave-trade was concerned. Fear, interest, and philanthropy united for a time in an effort which bade fair to suppress the trade; then the real weakness of the constitutional compromise appeared, and the interests of the few overcame the fears and the humanity of the many.



The DeWolf Crest



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yielding "one of the finest islands in the world" to "scenes which had never been practised since the destruction of Carthage." "But, sir," he continued, "we have lived to see these dreadful scenes. These horrid effects have succeeded what was conceived once to be trifling. Most important consequences may be the result, although gentlemen little apprehend it. But we know the situation of things there, although they do not, and knowing we deprecate it. There have been emissaries amongst us in the Southern States; they have begun their war upon us; an actual organization has commenced; we have had them meeting in their club rooms, and debating on that subject.... Sir, I do believe that persons have been sent from France to feel the pulse of this country, to know whether these [i.e., the Negroes] are the proper engines to make use of: these people have been talked to; they have been tampered with, and this is going on."

Finally, after censuring certain parts of this Negro petition, Congress committed the part on the slave-trade to the committee already appointed. Meantime, the Senate sent down a bill to amend the Act of 1794, and the House took this bill under consideration.⁵³ Prolonged debate ensued. Brown of Rhode Island again made a most elaborate plea for throwing open the foreign slave-trade. Negroes, he said, bettered their condition by being enslaved, and thus it was morally wrong and commercially indefensible to impose "a heavy fine and imprisonment ... for carrying on a trade so advantageous;" or, if the trade must be stopped, then equalize the matter and abolish slavery too. Nichols of Virginia thought that surely the gentlemen would not advise the importation of more Negroes; for while it "was a fact, to be sure," that they would thus improve their condition, "would it be policy so to do?" Bayard of Delaware said that "a more dishonorable item of revenue" than that derived from the slave-trade "could not be established." Rutledge opposed the new bill as defective and impracticable: the former act, he said, was enough; the States had stopped the trade, and in addition the United States had sought to placate philanthropists by stopping the use of our ships in the trade. "This was going very far indeed." New England first began the trade, and why not let them enjoy its profits now as well as the English? The trade could not be stopped.

The bill was eventually recommitted and reported again.⁵⁴ "On the question for its passing, a long and warm debate ensued," and several attempts to postpone it were made; it finally passed, however, only Brown of Rhode Island, Dent of Maryland, Rutledge and Huger of South Carolina, and Dickson of North Carolina voting against it, and 67 voting for it.⁵⁵ This Act of May 10, 1800,⁵⁶ greatly strengthened the Act of 1794. The earlier act had prohibited citizens from equipping slavers for the

53. SENATE JOURNAL (reprinted 1821), 6th Congress, 1st Session, III. 72, 77, 88, 92; see SENATE JOURNAL, Index, Bill No. 62; HOUSE JOURNAL (reprinted 1826), 6th Congress, 1st Session, III., Index, House Bill No. 247. For the debate, see ANNALS OF CONGRESS, 6th Congress, 1st Session, pages 686-700.

54. ANNALS OF CONGRESS, 6th Congress, 1st Session, page 697.

55. ANNALS OF CONGRESS, page 699-700.

56. STATUTES AT LARGE, II. 70.



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foreign trade; but this went so far as to forbid them having any interest, direct or indirect, in such voyages, or serving on board slave-ships in any capacity. Imprisonment for two years was added to the former fine of \$2000, and United States commissioned ships were directed to capture such slavers as prizes. The slaves though forfeited by the owner, were not to go to the captor; and the act omitted to say what disposition should be made of them.



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1802



March: In [Rhode Island](#), [John Brown](#) severely injured a leg when the wheel of his sulky dipped into a ditch and the carriage overturned.



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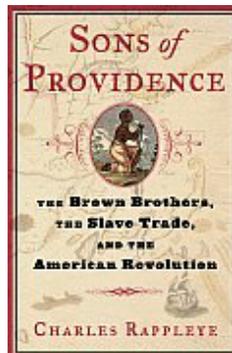
1803

 September 20, Tuesday: In [Dublin](#), Robert Emmett was executed for organizing another Rising.

[John Brown](#) died. Charles Rappleye, in his *SONS OF PROVIDENCE: THE BROWN BROTHERS, THE SLAVE TRADE, AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006, page 336), on the one hand suggests –and on the other hand carefully refrains from suggesting– that John’s death was the reason that his brother [Friend Moses Brown](#) withdrew in approximately this timeframe from active participation in the abolitionist cause (we may remember that Rappleye’s major thesis in this recent trade press book shot through with factual errors is that all the [Rhode Island](#) hoopla had amounted to a mere case of “sibling rivalry”):

It may presume too much to say that John’s death spelled the end of Moses Brown’s campaign against slavery, but it’s hard not to see a connection. Moses remained invested in the cause of Africans in America, and continued his personal engagement in attending to their welfare. But after 1803, he did not author another piece of legislation relating to slavery or the slave trade, nor did he take any steps to orchestrate lobbying efforts by the abolition society.

It may be that Moses was simply exhausted by twenty-five years of politics, advocacy, and agitation. It’s possible that, according to some unspoken calculus, Moses decided he had paid off the debt he incurred by his role in the voyage of the *Sally*. And it is true that the abolition movement as a whole lost momentum around the turn of the century, having achieved much of its agenda in the North and seeing little prospect of success in the South. But in Moses’ case, it appears there was something else at work. It was not like him to leave off a pursuit he cared about so deeply as slavery simply because the political winds had shifted. And though he was growing old, he remained active in several fields, realizing some of his greatest successes late in his long life. His abrupt retreat on the question of slavery suggests that in this most personal and most heartfelt quest, the looming presence of his brother was a more powerful factor than Moses ever acknowledged, even to himself.... With John gone, Moses had lost his personal stake in the contest.⁵⁷





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57. Those of you who want to know the real reason why Moses discontinued his abolitionist activities should consult Rosalind Cobb Wiggins's article "Paul and Stephen, Unlikely Friends" in [Quaker History](#), Volume 90 Number 1 (Spring 2001). The real reason will surprise you.



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1919

In England in 1916 Fry's and [Cadbury's](#) had merged their manufacturing operations, and at this point they merged also their financial interests. Two formerly [Quaker](#) firms had coalesced into one formerly Quaker firm.

At the combined factory Saturday ceased to be a full day of work and the hours of workers thereby fell, to 44/week.



CHOCOLATE

The [Moses Brown School](#) of the [Religious Society of Friends](#) on the East Side of [Providence, Rhode Island](#) celebrated the centenary of its initiation in 1819.



Publication, by the school, of Professor Rayner Wickersham Kelsey's A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF MOSES



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excursion. On this gala day the teachers and pupils not only



enjoyed the view of water and country green, but lived again the heroic scenes of earlier times. As they passed down the harbor the earthworks on opposite sides, at Fort Hill and Fields Point, were pointed out to them as the places where the bristling cannon of the Revolutionary patriots bade defiance to the ships of King George. A few miles farther down the bay appeared Gaspee Point, where Captain Ben Lindsay swung his packet around the point in 1772 and lured the Gaspee to her tightening berth on the sandbar where the patriots of Providence seized and destroyed her. Then at Mount Hope, with the gracious view of wooded hills and far-flung bay, came those other visions of the good chief [Massasoit](#), friend and protector of the Pilgrim Fathers, and then the mighty struggle and tragic death of his son, King [Philip](#). Amid such scenes, with Walter Meader to point out the historical landmarks, and Thomas Battey to reveal the hidden wonders of nature in brook and inlet, field and forest, the picnic parties from Friends' School spent some of the happiest and most profitable days of the epoch. The life of the period was new life. The tendency of the preceding epoch to break through the ancient [Quaker](#) exclusiveness was accentuated. Old forms were laid aside. Innovations were welcomed if they gave promise of usefulness. The happy social life, the rapid growth of student organizations and activities, and the more intimate association with other schools and with outside interests in general, these were the sure signs that the ancient and medieval days were done,



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the renaissance accomplished, and the modern age at hand.



However, in this year the school discontinued the “principal” system of incentive compensation which had been in effect for well over half a century, and which had led to the desires of their founder, Friend Moses Brown, being so utterly ignored! –Would that mean that the school was going to go back to being what it had been chartered to be, a guarded environment for the imparting of a Quaker education to Quaker youth? Stay tuned.



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1995

January 5, Thursday: Americans who were, ostensibly, Christians, such as the good Baptist [John Brown](#) of [Providence](#),



[Rhode Island](#), had in antebellum years been much more heavily involved in the [international slave trade](#) than Jews such as those of the [Touro Synagogue](#) in [Newport](#). Nevertheless, antisemitic black militants had begun to identify American Jews with slave trading — as if Jews had been primarily or solely responsible. Therefore the American Historical Association passed a resolution: “The AHA ... condemns as false any statement alleging that Jews played a disproportionate role in the exploitation of slave labor or in the Atlantic slave trade.” A Jewish source has pointed out that:⁵⁸

58. The figure of 1,275 persons listed as having been imported by Jews or by partnerships including Jews is entirely made up of individuals imported to the USA by the one [Newport, Rhode Island](#) businessman, President of the congregation of [Touro Synagogue](#), [Aaron Lopez](#):



This individual admittedly funded some 200 ventures at sea, approximately 20 of which were slaving ventures. No other such businessman was cited in this study despite the fact that Lopez was most definitely not acting alone in Newport, and despite the fact that the firm with which he was affiliated had another major North American office, in the port of Charlestown SC. To arrive at such a statistic, slaves delivered to other destinations went uncounted. The quote is per Eli Faber’s *SLAVERY AND THE JEWS: A HISTORICAL INQUIRY*, in the “Occasional Paper Series” funded by Anne Bass Schneider and Dr. Louis Schneider of Fort Wayne IN for the Jewish Studies Program of Hunter College.



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In all, 934 [Rhode Island](#) vessels are known to have transported slaves to the western hemisphere between 1709 and 1807. A total of 925 owners have been identified for these ships, of whom only 42, or 4.5%, were Jewish. Furthermore, only a minute fraction of [slaves](#) were carried on ships owned by Jewish merchants. Shipowners whose religion is identifiable are known to have transported a total of 64,708 slaves to the New World. Of these, only 1,275 slaves, or 1.9%, traveled on vessels owned by Jews and non-Jews in partnership. In contrast, 62,829 of the slaves, or 97 percent, were transported on ships owned exclusively by Rhode Island's non-Jewish merchants.

Lest there be any doubt about it: the [Quakers](#) of [Providence](#) want you to know that there were Quakers also who were involved in the [international slave trade](#) out of [Newport, Rhode Island](#). We know this, not because we know the names of all of the offending families—our researches, which have produced names such as Wanton, are as yet far from complete— but because we know that our meetings had to struggle with such persons, whoever they were, mired in their livelihood, in order to clear them and our association of this fault. This was a process which involved a good deal of time and a good deal of soul-searching, and was then covered over in a good deal of forgetting and self-satisfaction.



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1998

February 15, Sunday: An extraordinarily different article appeared in the local [Providence, Rhode Island](#) newspaper, the "ProJo":

History of slavery in R.I. not a story in black and white, but shades of gray

By JODY McPHILLIPS, Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

Steven Spielberg shot his slave-revolt film [La Amistad](#) in [Rhode Island](#) because the state has great Colonial architecture.

It made sense for other reasons.

Rhode Island played a bigger role than any other state in the [Atlantic slave trade](#) and had the only slave plantations in New England. At the same time, it was an early leader in the efforts to abolish slavery.

"Throughout the 18th century, Rhode Island merchants controlled between 60 and 90 percent of the American trade in African slaves," writes historian Jay Coughtry in *THE NOTORIOUS TRIANGLE: RHODE ISLAND AND THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE, 1700-1807*.

To be fair, the American slave trade amounted to just a small fraction of the European trade, which brought more than 11 million Africans to the New World over nearly 400 years.

Only half a million of them went directly to North American colonies; the rest went to the plantations and slave markets of Central and South America, from which some would be resold later to the southern colonies.

By comparison Rhode Island, which came the closest of any colony to having a slave trade of its own, made more than 900 slaving voyages during the 18th century, transporting about 106,000 slaves.

Few actually settled in Rhode Island, which was poorly suited for large-scale agriculture with its small rocky farms and icy winters. But they were bought from the slave fortresses of Africa's Gold Coast with Rhode Island-made rum; transported on Rhode Island-built ships to the slave markets of the Caribbean; and later dressed in Rhode Island-made slave cloth.

Why did Rhode Island get so involved?

Money, mostly. The state had good ports and skilled seamen but not much good farmland. Once the fertile areas of South County were settled, the only place to make real money was at sea.

And no trade was as profitable as slaving.



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Slave traders like the Browns of [Providence](#) amassed great fortunes, enough to build those mansions along Benefit Street and to found Brown University. Later, [Rhode Island](#) textile manufacturers produced the coarse cotton cloth slaves wore throughout the New World, much like prison garb today.

There were also coincidental connections.

Two groups who eventually settled here -the Portuguese and the Cape Verdeans- played huge roles in the early slave trade. In the 1400s, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to buy or steal humans from the west coast of Africa; they turned the empty, volcanic Cape Verde islands into a major depot for the worldwide slave trade and created a mixed-race population that flourishes today throughout southeastern New England.

And yet, from the earliest days, some Rhode Islanders were repelled by this human commerce.

The conflict tore families apart. [John Brown](#), of [Providence](#), was an avid slaver, his brother [Moses Brown](#) an abolitionist who fought him at every turn. [Bristol](#) slaver James DeWolf's son Levi made one slaving voyage and abandoned the trade in disgust; Levi's brother Charles once defended his extensive slaving activities by telling a preacher, "Parson, I've always wanted to roll in gold."

In 1774, the General Assembly outlawed importing slaves into [Rhode Island](#); a decade later, it was one of the first states to free children born of slave mothers.

It's a complicated story, with many moral shadings. Or, as Keith Stokes of [Newport](#) says, "It's not black and white so much as gray."

Humanity is divided into two: the masters and the slaves.

- Aristotle, POLITICS.

How could it happen? How could supposedly civilized people enslave other human beings?

Historian Hugh Thomas, in *THE SLAVE TRADE*, says slavery is as old as recorded history, known in virtually all cultures. Typically, slaves were people who lost wars, owed debts, broke laws or were sold into servitude by impoverished parents.

Throughout the Middle Ages, enslavement was increasingly linked to religious conflict. Moslems would enslave Christians, or vice versa: the dominant culture felt they were doing the "less enlightened" people a favor, by liberating them from error and exposing them to the true faith.

By the 1400s, the seafaring Portuguese had begun trading with the small fiefdoms of northwest Africa. They went



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looking for gold, but didn't find enough; increasingly, they brought home slaves, with the blessing of the Pope. Better a slave in an advanced Christian nation than a free subject of a "cannibal" king, the reasoning went. African slaves quickly became highly prized as strong, hardy workers able to withstand punishing tropical heat. As European colonists flooded into the New World, demand for workers grew exponentially, especially in the Caribbean islands and the plantations of Central and South America.

At first, the Europeans tried to enslave the native Indians too. The first slaves transported across the Atlantic, in fact, went west to east: Taino Indians brought to Spain from the Caribbean by Christopher Columbus.

But the New World Indians proved too susceptible to European diseases, and not strong enough to cultivate the new cash crops of sugar, tobacco, rice, cotton and indigo in the tropics.

It was the Africans' bad luck that they were physically well suited to hard work in hot climates – and that African kings and chieftains were so willing to sell their enemies and rivals into slavery.

Over the next centuries, the combined lure of gold and slaves drew successive waves of Europeans to Africa: the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Dutch, the French, and finally the English, in the mid-1600s.

They made no bones about why.

"A ship full of blacks brings more to the Treasury than galleons and fleets put together," wrote Pedro Zapata de Mendoza, governor of Cartagena de Indias (in present-day Colombia), in 1648.

The British entered the trade two centuries after the Portuguese, but quickly made up for lost time. One maritime city after another sent huge ships to Africa, capable of carrying as many as 450 slaves at once.

They made money hand over fist.

"Liverpool was in no way shy about the benefits brought her by the slave trade," Thomas writes about the city.

"The facade of the Exchange carried reliefs of Africans' heads, with elephants, in a frieze, and one street was commonly known as 'Negro Row.'"

By the end of the 17th century, British traders had exported nearly 100,000 slaves from Africa; by 1725, 75,000 had been sold to British North America.

It was about that time that slaving voyages start showing up in [Rhode Island](#) records.

The early eighteenth century marked the end of North America's novitiate in the traffic of slaves. In the seventeenth century, too poor or too concerned with



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primitive agriculture, colonists there had been slow to participate in any substantial way.

A few slaves acting as servants had always been seen in all the colonies; but it was not until the owners of plantations in the Carolinas ... realized they could make considerable profits from rice and indigo that anything like a regular trade in slaves began.

– Hugh Thomas

The only land in Rhode Island good enough for plantation-style farming was the [Narragansett](#) Country (South County today), where a handful of white landowners did get rich off the labor of black slaves in the years before the Revolution.

But the rest of the settlers had to come up with other ways to make money. The colony's most successful industry was distilling rum, which at first was sold mainly to other colonies. The strong, good-quality rum soon found a market with slave-trading Africans of the Gold Coast who preferred it to Caribbean rums, which could be weak, salty or packed in leaky barrels.

[Rhode Island](#) distillers in [Newport](#) (and later [Bristol](#) and [Providence](#)) were soon making double- and triple-distilled rums for the African trade, taking care to pack it in sturdy hogsheads. [Rhode Island](#) rum became so popular in Africa that, like gold, it served as money. The rum-for-slaves trade began slowly, with occasional voyages as far back as 1709. The triangle trade that evolved was simple: take rum to Africa, and trade it for slaves; take the slaves to the Caribbean, and trade them for molasses; take the molasses back to [Rhode Island](#), and make more rum.

Everybody made out – except the slaves.

At first, the trade was concentrated in [Newport](#). By 1725, one or two voyages a year were being recorded; by 1735, it was up to a dozen a year, a pace maintained until 1740, when fighting between England, Spain and then France disrupted all colonial commerce.

A pattern developed: when hostilities broke out, trade faltered; when peace resumed, slaving boomed. In 1750, 15 [Rhode Island](#) trips were recorded; by 1772, that number had doubled.

[Rhode Island](#) and, particularly, Newport, was, in the 1750s and 1760s, still the North American colonies' most important slaving zone. Newport, which always welcomed enterprising people without asking whence they came, also used more slaves in small businesses, farms, or homes than any other Northern colony.

– Hugh Thomas



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One Rhode Islander in nine was black, the highest percentage north of the Mason-Dixon line. Most were slaves on the [Narragansett](#) Country plantations, but others clustered in Newport, where an artisan class of skilled workers developed.

Slavery in New England -and particularly liberal Newport- was probably never absolute. From the early days, a small percentage of Newport blacks were free men, having bought or otherwise obtained their freedom. Keith Stokes, in an essay on the slave trade, writes, "An early 1770s census lists nearly one-third of (Newport's) 9,000 inhabitants as being Negro, both slave and free."

Ship captains were always looking for able mariners; by 1800, "black seamen made up 21 percent of all Newport crews engaged in the West Indian, European and African trades," writes Coughtry.

Yet at the same time, slavers were working out of [Providence](#), [Bristol](#) and [Warren](#) as well as Newport. (Bristol, in fact, surpassed [Newport](#) as the state's primary slaving port as the century closed). Merchants in Greenwich, [Tiverton](#), Little Compton and [North Kingstown](#) played a lesser role.

The slavers were some of the colony's leading citizens, their names still familiar today: Newport's John Bannister (Bannister's Wharf) and Abraham Redwood ([Redwood Library](#)); [John Brown](#) of [Providence](#) (Brown University); the DeWolfs of [Bristol](#), who built Linden Place.

One of the most active was [Aaron Lopez](#) of Newport, a founder of [Touro Synagogue](#), who entered the slave trade in 1762 and by 1775 was the largest taxpayer in Newport, with more than 30 ships.

Some were more reprehensible than others. In 1764, Simeon Potter of [Bristol](#) wrote to his captain on the slaver *King George*: "Water your rum as much as possible and sell as much by the short measure as you can."

Or the captain of James DeWolf's slaver *Polly*, who lashed a slave infected with smallpox to a chair, threw her overboard, and "lamented only the lost chair."

Merchants not rich enough to build their own ships pooled resources and invested in voyages. Later on, the ships were more often owned by individuals or family groups.

Rhode Islanders made a go of slaving for a number of reasons. Their small, sturdy ships held from 75 to 150 slaves, far fewer than the massive British or French slavers, but their survival rates were better. Shorter loading times in Africa exposed the crews to fewer new diseases, and less crowding of slaves meant fewer died on the voyage, which took from five to 12 weeks.

[La Amistad](#)-style rebellions did occur -17 revolts were



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recorded on [Rhode Island](#) slavers between 1730 and 1807–but were about half as common as on British and French slavers, perhaps because conditions were somewhat better on the smaller boats.

The British destruction of [Newport](#) during the Revolution brought a temporary halt to the trade. When it resumed after the war, much of the action shifted up the bay to [Bristol](#), home of the DeWolf clan.

Without a doubt, then, the DeWolfs had the largest interest in the African slave trade of any American family before or after the Revolution; theirs was one of the few fortunes that truly rested on rum and slaves.

– Jay Coughtry

It was a family operation, all right – along the lines of la cosa nostra.

The first DeWolf slaver was Mark Anthony DeWolf, who began as captain for his brother-in-law, Simeon Potter. By 1774, Mark Anthony and Charles, one of his five sons, had completed seven voyages and may have been financing their own ships, Coughtry writes.

Between 1784 and 1807, seven DeWolfs completed 88 slaving voyages, or one-quarter of all [Rhode Island](#) trips made in those years; they were involved in 60 percent of the slaving voyages from [Bristol](#).

They didn't just sail the ships – they branched out into all aspects of the operation. James DeWolf, another of Mark Anthony's sons, married the daughter of William Bradford, who owned [Bristol](#)'s rum distillery; he went on to make another fortune in cotton manufacturing, and served in the U.S. Senate.

Other sons sold slaves at slave markets in Charleston and Havana; the family also bought a Cuban sugar plantation, so they had a piece of the action at all stages of the cycle.

They were resourceful. As the public grew more repulsed by slavery and anti-slavery laws began to be passed, the DeWolfs dug in, and used their clout and connections to keep the money flowing.

By the turn of the century, William Ellery, the customs collector in [Newport](#), was cracking down on illegal slaving. The DeWolfs got the General Assembly to create a separate customs office in [Bristol](#), and in 1804 snared the collector's job for Charles Collins, a DeWolf in-law and a slaver himself.

It was clear sailing out of [Bristol](#) after that.

Although slavery was outlawed nationally as of 1808, James DeWolf continued slaving until 1820, "the period of the [[Rhode Island](#)] trade's greatest profits," writes Arline Ruth Kiven, in a history of the state's



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abolitionist movement called [THEN WHY THE NEGROES?](#)
"This was also the time of his greatest affluence," although, she notes, there are no records for the [Bristol](#) port during this period because Collins burned them all when he was finally ousted in 1820. Slavers were pretty crafty about staying ahead of the anti-slaving laws. A 1794 law banning U.S. citizens from carrying slaves to other nations, for example, had only one real enforcement provision: much like modern-day drug laws, the government could confiscate slaving vessels and sell them at auction. Slavers promptly rigged the auctions so they (or straw buyers) could buy back the ships for pocket change. The government countered by getting the ships assessed, and then sending an agent to the auction to enter that price as an opening bid. Samuel Bosworth, the surveyor for [Bristol](#), was the unfortunate soul sent to bid on the *Lucy*, a slaver confiscated from Charles DeWolf. He undertook the job "with considerable fear and trembling," writes Coughtry. The night before the sale, Bosworth got a visit from DeWolf, his brother James, and [John Brown](#), who advised him to refuse the assignment. He stood his ground. The next morning the DeWolfs dropped by again, telling Bosworth that while they certainly wouldn't harm a hair of his head, if he showed up at the sale he would probably be "insulted if not thrown off the wharf" by sailors. Bosworth never made it to the auction. "His would-be baptizers, in nominal Indian dress and with faces blackened, seized him as he approached the wharf, and hustled him aboard a small sailboat" which took him for a pleasant two-mile ride down the bay, Coughtry writes. By the time he made it back to [Bristol](#), the *Lucy* had been bought by a captain who worked for the DeWolfs. The DeWolfs - or their agents - at times went in for outright thuggery. In 1800 the Treasury Department sent Capt. John Leonard to [Rhode Island](#) as a kind of special prosecutor targeting slave traders. He promptly sued James DeWolf for \$20,000 over violations by DeWolf's slave ship *Fanny*. The jury found for DeWolf. But some months after the trial, "apparently fearful that Leonard's strategy against DeWolf would become a dangerous and costly precedent, a group of civic-minded Bristolians traveled to Washington to make their own appeal at the Federal Courthouse," Coughtry writes. When they spotted Leonard coming down the courthouse steps, "several unidentified assailants assaulted him."



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Whereas, there is a common course practiced by Englishmen to buy negers so that they may have them for service or slaves forever; for the preventing of such practices among us, let it be ordered that no blacke mankind or white, being forced by covenant bond, or otherwise, to serve any man or his assignes longer than 10 years or until they come to bee 24 years of age....

– [Rhode Island](#)'s first anti-slavery law, 1652

The 1652 law was supposed to ban slavery of any kind from [Providence](#) and Warwick, or indentured servitude for more than 10 years. It was enforced for whites but largely ignored for blacks; like so many cultures before them, the British colonies were deeply conflicted over slavery.

In 1636, Roger Williams, who founded the colony in [Providence](#), questioned the justice of enslaving the Pequots. Yet in 1676, the same man denounced one of the early calls for freeing black slaves as "nothing but a bundle of ignorance and boisterousness."

Kiven writes that the northern part of the state was always less enamored of slavery than the seafaring and farming south.

Slaving was not confined to a particular religion or sect. Christians and Jews made fortunes in the trade, though by the early 18th century [Quakers](#) began to question the ethics of what they were doing.

Abolitionist sentiment got a boost in 1738, when an article in the [English Weekly Miscellany](#) "declared that, if Africans were to seize people from the coast of England, one could easily imagine the screams of 'unjust' which would be heard," writes Thomas.

In [Newport](#) in 1770, the Rev. Samuel Hopkins of the First Congregational Church preached his first sermon against slavery, and was surprised when his congregation -many of whom owned slaves- did not walk out en masse.

Three years later, Hopkins got the idea of sending two educated blacks to Africa as missionaries. To that end, John Quamine and Bristol Yamma were sent to Princeton College to prepare.

The Revolution intervened, however, and Quamine died aboard a [privateer](#), while Yamma apparently dropped out of school to go to work and disappeared into history.

According to Kiven, the Quakers were the biggest and best-organized religious group in [Rhode Island](#), and once they began to oppose slavery, its days were numbered.

One by one, slave owners changed their minds. "College Tom" Hazard, heir to [Narragansett](#) Country landowner Robert Hazard, refused his father's offer of slaves on his marriage (Robert was said to own 1,000 slaves in 1730).



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In 1773, the younger Hazard convinced the Quaker Yearly Meeting to ban Quaker participation in slavery. That same year [Moses Brown](#) of [Providence](#) quit the family slaving business, and began a decades-long assault on his brother, [John Brown](#), for continuing to buy and sell humans; the next year he became a [Quaker](#).

The approach of the Revolution brought a temporary end to slaving, but also disrupted abolitionist momentum. In 1774, the General Assembly passed a law banning residents from importing slaves to [Rhode Island](#), though it said nothing about visitors, or slaveowners who might want to move here.

(That was partly because [Newport](#) had a prosperous relationship with rich Southern plantation owners, who summered in [Rhode Island](#) before the Civil War, to escape the ferocious southern heat).

Brown, working with Hopkins, set about lobbying the state legislature as well as the Continental Congress; Hopkins wrote a persuasive tract, DIALOGUE CONCERNING THE SLAVERY OF THE AFRICANS, which was used well into the 19th century as an argument for abolition.

The war also gave blacks a chance to earn their own freedom. In 1778, a law was passed freeing any slave who would enlist in the Continental Army; several hundred formed the First [Rhode Island](#) Regiment, which performed well in battle, although the soldiers later had trouble getting paid.

"Their courage in battle and the subsequent gratitude of the people of the state to them is credited for the law, passed in 1784, providing for the gradual abolition of slavery in the state," writes Kiven.

The new law, which freed children born of slaves, passed only after a provision banning the trade entirely was removed. According to [Moses Brown](#), the act was eviscerated by the Speaker of the House, William Bradford of [Bristol](#).

Yes, the same Bradford who ran the big Bristol rum distillery, and whose daughter was married to slave-trader James DeWolf.

State House insiders were apparently getting pretty sick of lectures from the reform-minded [Quakers](#). Wrote Brown, "We were much flung at by several."

Is it not extraordinary that [[Rhode Island](#)], which has exceeded the rest of the states in carrying on this trade, should be the first Legislature on this globe which has prohibited that trade?

— Rev. Samuel Hopkins, Nov. 27, 1787

Other states were wrestling with the slavery issue. It proved so contentious that in 1787, when the Continental



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Congress adopted a constitution, it deferred any national action on slavery until 1808.

New England, however, wasn't waiting around. [Rhode Island](#) banned the trade entirely in 1787; Connecticut and Massachusetts followed suit the following year.

True, the slave trade would continue for 70 years, by one means or another. Some slavers shifted operations to ports like New York, which had not yet passed any slaving laws; others simply broke the law.

But in 1789, Hopkins and [Moses Brown](#) helped found the Providence Abolition Society, which worked for anti-slaving laws and sued those who broke them.

One such was [John Brown](#), Moses' brother. The society sued him in 1796 on charges of illegal slave-trading; though he offered to abandon the trade and pay all court costs, they seemed to want to make an example of him. They should have taken the deal. He was acquitted.

"The verdict was a definite defeat for the Society, many of whose members became convinced that a [Rhode Island](#) jury would not give judgment against the prominent type of men engaged in the slave-trade," writes Kiven.

Over the next few decades a pattern evolved. Abolitionists would pressure the government to pass anti-slavery legislation, and the slaving interests would do what they could to water it down.

Once a law was passed, business would temporarily falter while the slavers watched to see how strictly the law would be enforced; usually, enforcement was sporadic, and business actually increased.

The American and British governments finally banned slaving as of 1808. But the trade hardly stopped. Some American ships flew Spanish flags; Gen. George DeWolf of [Bristol](#) simply shifted his operations to Cuba.

The American law only banned the international slave trade. American slavers could still trade slaves internally, or move them up and down the coast. And they did, because demand was huge.

With the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, the demand for agricultural workers exploded in the south, Thomas writes. In 1792, the United States exported 138,328 pounds of cotton; by 1800, it was 17,790,000 pounds and by 1820, 35,000,000 pounds.

The planters weren't going to pick it themselves.

[Rhode Island](#) participation in the slave trade after Jan. 1, 1808, is a maddening puzzle, for most of the pieces are missing.

– Jay Coughtry

It looks like [Rhode Island](#) slavers began to pull out of the business after the federal ban, although it's hard

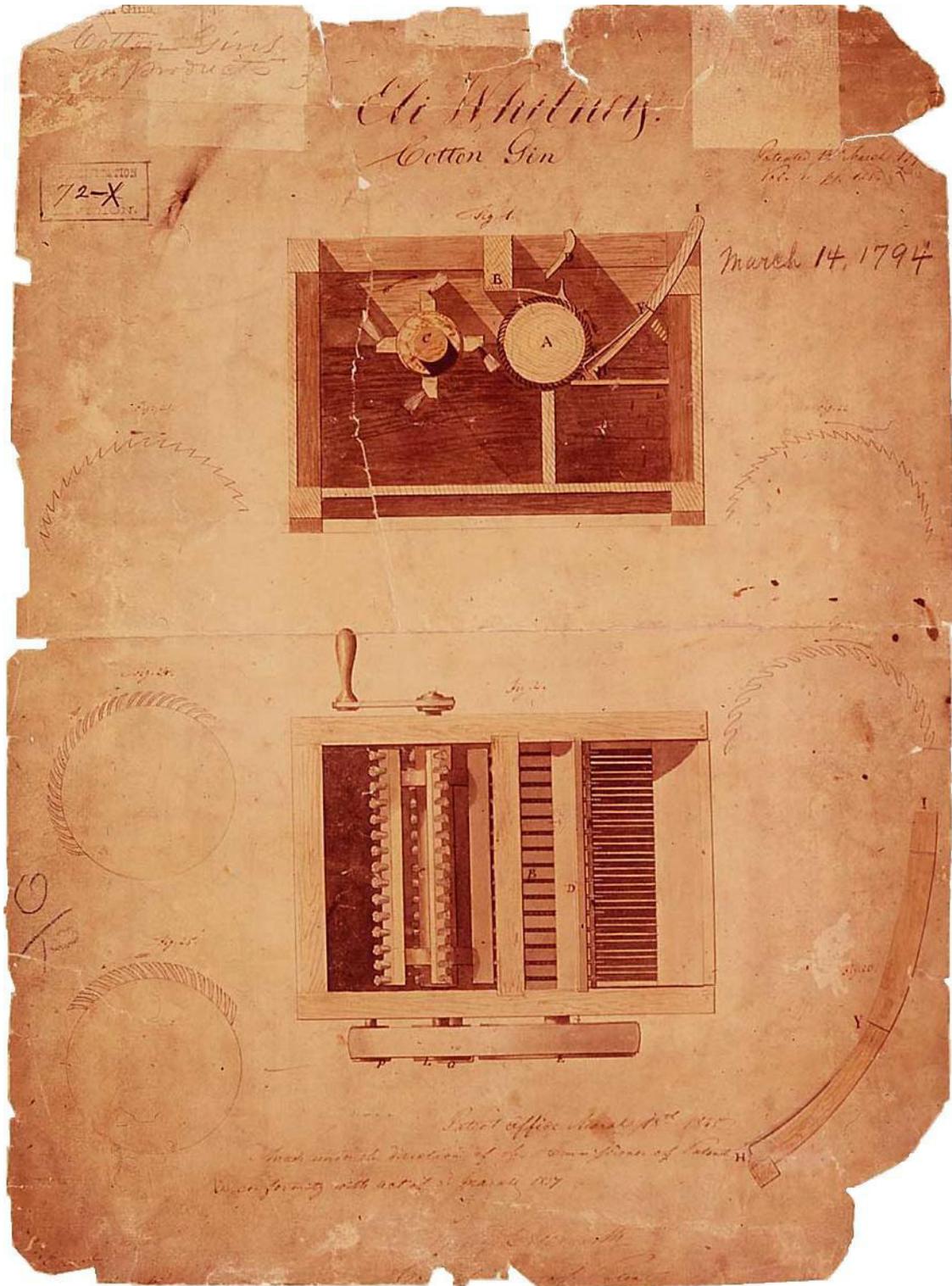
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WHAT?

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to be sure since it was easy to cheat, particularly at first.

Some, like the DeWolfs, continued to slave illegally. But Coughtry concludes that "it does not appear that [Rhode Island](#) ports or individual [Rhode Island](#) merchants participated in the illegal heyday of the modern American slave trade" between 1820 and 1860.

They abandoned the business sporadically, much as they had started. [John Brown](#) died in 1803. James DeWolf quit the trade in 1808, though his brother George continued until 1820, when the sympathetic Collins was fired in [Bristol](#); after a series of business failures, George fled the state in 1825 for his Cuban plantation.

[Rhode Island](#) merchants gradually turned away from the maritime trade and invested their money in cotton mills – by 1830, the state had 130 of them. They managed to squeeze yet more profit from slavery: many specialized in coarse slave or negro cloth, worn by slaves throughout the New World.

Abolitionists kept up the pressure. The Providence Abolition Society was joined by other groups; three buildings still standing today served as stations on the Underground Railroad – the Isaac Rice homestead in [Newport](#), the Elizabeth Buffum Chace house in [Central Falls](#), and the Charles Perry home in [Westerly](#).

Some decided not to wait. In 1826, a group of free Newport blacks, led by former slave Newport Gardiner, sailed for Liberia with the help of the American Colonization Society.

Gardiner, who worked for years to buy freedom for himself and his family, was freed in 1791. He helped found the nation's first black civic organizations, the African Union Society, and the African Benevolent Society.

His decision to leave came 14 months after white rioters destroyed Hard Scrabble, the black community in [Providence](#) (University Heights today).

He was 75 years old.

"I go to set an example for the youth of my race," he said. "I go to encourage the young. They can never be elevated here. I have tried it for 60 years.... It is in vain."

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2002

March 31, Sunday: A reparations lawsuit was filed, to obtain compensation for human slavery on behalf of the descendants of American slaves, from the inheritors of American corporations that historically had profited from the uncompensated labors of slaves or from the slave trade's dealings in human beings:

March 31, 2002

Lawsuit maintains slavery extended past plantations
Action on behalf of descendants claims companies profited
unfairly

By JEFF DONN

Associated Press

BOSTON – Imagine slavery, and you'll likely picture black workers stooped over rows of cotton in the South.

Yet lawyers who recently filed a federal lawsuit seeking corporate reparations for slavery named three companies far removed from farming, two of them based in New England.

The lawyers, suing on behalf of millions of slave descendants, may eventually name more than 1,000 companies.

But the initial defendants are FleetBoston Financial Corp., of Boston; insurer Aetna, of Hartford, Conn., and railway operator CSX Corp., of Richmond, Va.

How can this be?

Historians say the lawsuit, whatever its merits, serves as a reminder that slavery also extended into the Northern economy and, in the Old South, touched many industries beyond the plantations.

Lawyers for slave descendants picked FleetBoston because [Rhode Island](#) slave trader [John Brown](#) was a founder of its 18th century predecessor, [Providence](#) Bank.

The bank financed Brown's slave voyages and profited from them, the lawsuit says.

Brown was born in 1736 into an influential merchant family with holdings that would eventually extend into salt, meat, lumber, bricks, iron and even chocolate.

He helped charter what became [Brown University](#) (though it is named for his nephew, [Nicholas Brown, Jr.](#)).

John Brown owned or co-owned at least six ships with inspirational names like the Hope and the Providence, according to Rachel Chernos Lin, a Brown University graduate student researching the history of the area's slave trade.

Brown's boats would load up with local rum, sell it in West Africa, pick up slaves, sell them in the Caribbean or the South, and often fill up with sugar or molasses for the journey home. They would carry 200 slaves or more on a trip.

Other local merchants did the same sort of trade, but it didn't always go unchallenged. Brown's own brother, [Moses Brown](#), was an ardent abolitionist.

He helped the Abolition Society successfully sue his brother under the U.S. Slave Trade Act of 1794, an early anti-slavery



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law that banned outfitting ships to carry slaves. John Brown had to forfeit the Hope, according to Jay Coughtry, a historian at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. From 1709 to 1807, Rhode Island merchants invested in more than 930 slaving trips to Africa, Coughtry estimates. They wrested more than 105,000 Africans from their homeland. Brown eventually dropped that kind of business - "not because it was immoral, but because it wasn't profitable," says Norman Fiering, a library administrator at Brown University. FleetBoston has declined comment. CSX wants the lawsuit thrown out. In a statement, the rail line said the impacts of slavery "cannot be attributed to any single company or industry." Railway historians say slaves virtually built the rail network of the South from the 1830s to the 1850s. Of nearly 120 railroads, at least 90 -and probably more- used slave labor for construction, maintenance or other jobs, says historian Ted Kornweibel at San Diego State University. In the peak years before the Civil War, he says, about 15,000 slaves labored annually for Southern railroads. The companies that eventually folded into CSX are no exception. At least 37 of them used slave labor, Kornweibel says, based on his research. Sometimes they owned the slaves; sometimes they rented them from seasonal surpluses at plantations. A contract signed Feb. 12, 1862, is typical. P.V. Daniel Jr., president of CSX's Virginia predecessor, the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac railroad, promised to pay \$160 to Mrs. B.B. Wright. Her two rented slaves were identified only as John Henry and Reuben. They were to be returned clothed as when they arrived. Some years, individual slaves, often worth more than \$1,000 in a sale, cost up to \$200 to rent for a season. Some railroad contracts of that era specified that they must be properly fed. If a rented slave ran away, the owner often paid for lost job time. Slaves remained valuable economic commodities into the Civil War years. Insurers, including Aetna, began selling a new product, life insurance, to compensate owners for the loss of slaves. In its response to the reparations lawsuit, Aetna said the "events -however regrettable- occurred hundreds of years ago" and "in no way reflect Aetna today." Still, the company, founded in 1853, has acknowledged that it holds records of five Aetna life insurance policies on slaves and knows of at least two others. Together, they insured the lives of 16 slaves in Virginia and South Carolina. In one policy, a slave was identified simply as "James, 23, a blacksmith." The slave owners who took out the policies agreed to pay \$5 to \$10 for a term of one-to-three months, perhaps to insure against loss during a planting season. "From their perspective at the time, they really needed that labor," says Aetna spokesman Fred Laberge. Plantation owners mostly sought out such policies, beginning the



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business with other insurance companies in the 1840s. Sometimes railroads, canal builders, and others with dangerous work also insured the lives of slaves.

"Slaves were involved in almost all aspects of Southern industries," said historian Charles Dew, at Williams College, in Williamstown, Mass.

As with some policies today, the insured person had to be healthy. Slaves were rejected for coverage for such reasons as a hernia or simply being "unsound," according to Todd Savitt, a historian at East Carolina University, in Greenville, N.C.

In a review of 1,693 life policies for slaves in 1856, Savitt calculated the average payout on death at \$665. The average payout on 500 policies insuring whites during the same period was \$3,500.

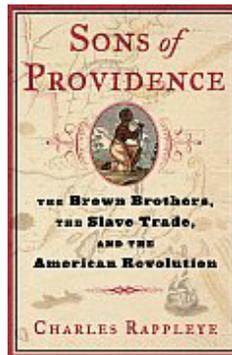


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2006

Rappleye, Charles. *SONS OF PROVIDENCE: THE BROWN BROTHERS, THE SLAVE TRADE, AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006)



The burden of this book about the brothers [John Brown](#) and [Friend Moses Brown](#) of [Providence, Rhode Island](#) is that Moses probably discontinued his abolitionist work after the death of his brother John because the struggle had not been so much between enslavement and liberation, as between two brothers locked in a game of "sibling rivalry." Rappleye concludes that "With John gone, Moses had lost his personal stake in the contest."

Those of you who want to know the real reason why Moses discontinued his abolitionist work may consult Rosalind Cobb Wiggins's article "Paul and Stephen, Unlikely Friends" in [Quaker History](#), Volume 90 Number 1 (Spring 2001). The truth of the matter is that as soon as the antebellum American friends had divested themselves of their slaves, and as soon as these black people had affiliated themselves into separate-but-equal religious groups such as the AME church, race relations became for the white Quakers one of those "not our problem" problems. Quakers, in purifying themselves of involvement in slavery, had established a sort of apartheid. The Quakers were all white people. The Quakers were quietists, isolated within their "Quaker Close." They had set up a region of personal and corporate purity, within which they were safe and secure. Persons of color who approached the Quaker meetings and asked to become members were simply stiffed, endlessly stiffed. The situation got so unwholesome that when "[Hicksites](#)" such as Friend [Lucretia Coffin Mott](#) visited Providence and attempted to enter the Friends meetinghouse there for worship, Friend Moses had someone posted at that door to turn them away. These "Hicksites" were Quakers who had remained abolitionist after these "Orthodox" Quakers had purified themselves by separating themselves entirely from people of color and the concerns of people of color, in effect embracing apartheid or segregation,



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so they were not about to allow themselves to be contaminated by them – so Friend Lucretia had to go worship with the Unitarians.

Now get this. You might suppose that the line of continuity stretches across the Civil War, from the **antebellum white abolitionists** to the Reconstruction-era **white liberal integrationists**. It does not. The line of continuity that stretches across the Civil War starts with the **antebellum white abolitionists such as the Quakers** and ends up with the Reconstruction-era **white segregationists and Jim Crow**. How do we know that? We know that because, even before the Civil War, abolitionists like Moses had already become "Orthodox" segregationists, and had shunned those "Hicksites" who had refused to become racially segregationist.

The newsman storyteller Rappleye -with his reductionistic "John died and so the sibling rivalry was over" pseudoexplanation-entirely missed this, and the reason why he missed this is that he didn't do his historical homework.

The author offered a book talk in Providence, sponsored by the Rhode Island Historical Society which Moses Brown helped to found. He began with an explanation: "I'm not a historian, I'm a storyteller." He sold hardcover copies of his book, autographed, and I bought one. What I found was that this storyteller has copied a bunch of stuff from previously published books about the Brown brothers John and Moses, and larded this out with general historical paragraphs about the American revolution and Rhode Island's involvement in the Triangular Trade, and added a slew of his own new factoids (all of which are incorrect). That's sorry enough, but he did this in order to support a simplistic, reductionist, and inaccurate conclusion, that Moses Brown's opposition to the international slave trade is primarily to be accounted for as a mere case of sibling rivalry.

On the back cover, the book receives an "advance praise" blurb from the historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, author of *TEAM OF RIVALS: THE POLITICAL GENIUS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN*, which also happens to be issued by the trade press Simon & Schuster (a mere coincidence). Here is the blurber, posing with a reader who had the face of



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Abraham Lincoln tattooed onto his shoulder:



Goodwin describes her fellow author's book as "a terrific story."

On its back cover, Rappleye's book also receives an "advance praise" blurb from A.J. Langguth, author of *PATRIOTS: THE MEN WHO STARTED THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*, which also happens to be issued by the trade press Simon & Schuster (another mere coincidence).

On its back cover, Rappleye's book also receives an "advance praise" blurb from Thomas Fleming, author of *WASHINGTON'S SECRET WAR: THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF VALLEY FORGE*, a book which was issued by the publisher HarperCollins's American subsidiary. Collins happens to be a trade press devoted to books on "Wellness, Lifestyle, Business, Design, and Reference, with the mission to empower consumers to Live More, Do More, Learn More."

On its back cover, Rappleye's book also receives an "advance praise" blurb from Henry Wiencek, author of *AN IMPERFECT GOD: GEORGE WASHINGTON, HIS SLAVES, AND THE CREATION OF AMERICA*, a book issued by Farrar Straus Giroux, a trade press specializing in literary fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and children's books. Wiencek alleges that "[t]his powerfully told narrative sheds new light." —Evidently he didn't take note of Rappleye's factual errors even when those factual errors extended into his own field of expertise, that of the relationship between President Washington and his slaves.

One can only hope that these blurbers' standards of accuracy and



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responsibility, in doing their own work, are **substantially higher** than the standards by which they provide their "advance praise" blurbs for a trade press effort as crowdpleasing, and as offensive, as this one.

This is not a book published by a scholarly press, with peer review. Had there been some sort of peer review by actual historians such an amateur effort would have died the silent death of a thousand papercuts. It is, instead, a book published by Simon & Schuster, a commercial corporation which one might characterize as one of the "trade presses." That is to say, when an author comes to such a press with a manuscript, the schlockmeisters have one question at the forefront of their minds and one question only. How many copies of this piece of shit can we sell?

The day of the academic press, publishing subsidized scholarly monographs, is well known in the groves of academe to be over – there simply isn't the money available, for the universities to maintain that kind of publishing. The day of the trade press, publishing unanalyzed schlock like this, however, ought to be over, and ought to be over as soon as humanly possible. From now on let's do internet publishing, and by means of internet publishing combined with peer review, **let's raise our scholarly standards.**

March 15, Wednesday: In [Providence, Rhode Island](#)'s "ProJo," the [Providence Journal](#), Paul Davis's series about the days of [slavery](#) and the [international slave trade](#) continued:

1 Boye Slave Dyed: The Terrible Voyage of the Sally

The first ship to leave [Providence](#) for Africa was sent by James Brown in 1735, but only a smattering of ships departed from that port before the Revolutionary War. Providence never became a busy slave center, like [Newport](#) and Bristol.

Newport dominated the state's slave trade for the first 50 years. All trade came to a halt during the seven years the colonies fought for independence from Great Britain. When the war ended, [Rhode Island](#) ships again cleared for Africa. Newport continued to send dozens of ships to Africa, but Providence and [Warren](#), and especially [Bristol](#), became bigger players.

Between 1784 and 1807, 402 ships sailed from Rhode Island for Africa.

Providence, which sent 55 of those ships, accounted for only 14 percent of the state's slave trade.

* * *

Capt. [Esek Hopkins](#) had just cleared the African coast when one of his captives died.

The young girl wasn't the first.

For nine long months, Hopkins had bartered with slave traders on behalf of the Brown brothers of Providence - Nicholas,



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Joseph, John and Moses. By late August 1765, he had finally purchased enough slaves, 167, so he could leave. Tarrying on the malarial coast -sailors called it the White Man's Grave- Hopkins had already lost 20 slaves and two members of his crew.

On his first -and last- slave trade voyage on the *Sally* in 1765, Capt. Esek Hopkins lost 109 slaves to uprisings and disease. The failed attempt marked a turning point for the Brown family of Providence as [Moses Brown](#) turned his back on the slave trade. Now, on board the 120-ton brig *Sally*, the deaths continued.

"1 boye slave Dyed," Hopkins wrote on Aug. 25. He kept a tally of the slave deaths in his trade book. The young boy was number 22.

The Browns had instructed Hopkins to sell his slaves in the West Indies for "hard cash" or "good bills of exchange."

"Dispatch," they reminded him, "is the life of Business."

Esek Hopkins, 46, had spent years at sea, but, until now, he had never helmed a slave ship.

At 20, he left the family farm in Scituate to board a ship bound for Surinam, a South American port favored by Newport captains and slave dealers. Two older brothers also sailed. John died at sea; Samuel died at Hispaniola, a Caribbean slave and sugar center, now known as Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Stephen, a third brother, rose through the ranks of colonial politics and became governor of Rhode Island.

Esek married in 1741, bought a farm in Providence and also dabbled in civic affairs. But he preferred the sea. Aggressive and outspoken, he worked for more than three decades as a privateer and merchant-adventurer, sometimes for the Browns. During the Seven Years' War between England and France, he captured a French ship loaded with oil and other goods.

But commanding a slave ship required knowledge of African tribal customs and negotiating skills; he possessed neither. He wasn't even the Browns' first choice; many Rhode Island captains were already on the African coast.

Stocked with handcuffs, leg irons, chains and padlocks, the *Sally* was a floating prison.

The women, mostly naked, lived unchained on the quarterdeck. Crew members believed there was little chance they would stage a rebellion.

The males, chained together in pairs, were kept below deck, where they struggled for air in the dark humid hold. Their spaces were so cramped they struggled to sit up.

In good weather, Hopkins and his crew exercised the more than 100 African slaves on deck, and scrubbed their filthy quarters with water and vinegar.

On Aug. 28, just eight days after leaving the coast of Africa, Hopkins freed some of the slaves to help with the chores. Instead, they freed other slaves and turned on what was left of his crew. "...the whole rose upon the People, and endeavored to get Possession of the vessel," the Newport [Mercury](#) reported later. Outnumbered, the sailors grabbed some of the weapons aboard the *Sally*: 4 pistols, 7 swivel guns, 13 cutlasses, 2



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blunderbusses and a keg of gunpowder. The curved cutlass blades and short-barreled blunderbusses - favored by pirates and highwaymen - were ideal weapons for killing enemies in close quarters. "Destroyed 8 and several more wounded," Hopkins wrote. One slave suffered broken ribs, another a cracked thigh bone. Both later died.

At sea, the *Sally* creaked and rolled as the crew kept careful watch on the remaining males shackled on the decks below. Above deck, Hopkins revised the death count in his trade book. 32, he wrote.

* * *

Back in Providence, the Browns had high hopes for the *Sally*. Among the city's richest men, they operated under the name Nicholas Brown and Company. They owned all or partial interest in a number of ships; a candle factory at Fox Point; a rope factory, sugar house and chocolate mill and two rum distilleries.

Just before the *Sally* sailed, they invested in an iron foundry on the [Pawtuxet](#) River, the Hope Furnace in [Scituate](#). Esek's brother, Stephen, was a partner. To help raise cash for the new foundry and their candle business, the Browns invested in the *Sally* and two non-slave ships that carried horses and other goods to the Caribbean.

Sending the *Sally* to Africa marked the first time the four brothers, as a group, had ventured into the slave trade.

Their great-great grandfather, [Chad Brown](#), had been an early religious leader of the colony along with founder Roger Williams. The brothers' grandfather, James, a pious [Baptist](#) church elder, was openly critical of Providence's rising merchant class.

Yet, his son, Capt. James Brown, rejected the pulpit for the counting house. He sailed to the West Indies, ran a slaughter house, opened a shop and ran two distilleries. Unlike the earlier Browns, James recorded his children's births in his business ledger, rather than the family Bible.

And in 1735, he sent Providence's first slave ship to Africa. "Gett Molases if you can" and "leave no debts behind," James wrote to his brother, Obadiah. The market was poor; still, Obadiah traded the Mary's human cargo in the West Indies for coffee, cordage, duck and salt. He brought three slaves, valued at 120 English pounds, back to Providence.

When James died three years later, Obadiah helped raise his brother's sons: Nicholas, Joseph, John and Moses.

In 1759, John and Nicholas joined Obadiah and other merchants in outfitting another slave ship, the *Wheel of Fortune*. It was captured by a French privateer. "Taken" wrote Obadiah in his insurance book.

The sons were not deterred.

[Abraham Redwood](#) was one of the principal contributors to The Redwood Library and Athenaeum when it was opened in 1750. Although he made his fortune from his Caribbean plantations and the slave trade, Redwood was remembered at the time of his death



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as a philanthropist and benefactor of the poor. Although the local economy had suffered during the war between France and Britain, the slave trade surged in 1763. In Virginia, plantation owner Carter Braxton urged the Browns to send him slaves. I understand, he said, there is a "great Traid carried on from Rhode Island to Guinea for Negroes." The Browns did not act on Braxton's offer. But in the summer of 1754, three of the brothers helped stock the *Sally* with 17,274 gallons of rum, the main currency of the Rhode Island slave trade, 1,800 bunches of onions, 90 pounds of coffee, 40 barrels of flour, 30 boxes of candles, 25 casks of rice, 10 hogsheads of tobacco, 6 barrels of tar, and bread, molasses, beef and pork. The *Sally's* crew included a first and second mate, Hopkins' personal slave and a cooper to make barrels for the molasses the *Sally* would receive in trade for slaves. The Browns agreed to pay Esek Hopkins 50 pounds a month for the voyage. Although it was slightly less than the wages paid the first and second mates, Hopkins was also promised a fat bonus, or "privilege," including 10 barrels of rum and 10 slaves. Most Rhode Island captains received a bonus of 4 slaves per 104 sold at market. Because hard money was scarce in Rhode Island, the first and second mates were also offered slaves as commissions. For the Browns, the stakes were high. For 50 years, Newport had been the colony's major shipping port. The Browns, along with Gov. Stephen Hopkins and a few other merchants, wanted to make Providence the political and commercial center of Rhode Island. "The Browns knew that the trade posed risks, but they also knew it could result in tremendous profits," says James Campbell, a Brown University professor. "They clearly anticipated a very profitable voyage."

* * *

Hopkins, however, fared poorly in Africa. With the end of the Seven Years' War, transatlantic trade resumed; British and New England ships jammed Africa's slave castles, trade forts and river mouths. "Demand was great and prices were high," Campbell says. "The seller had the upper hand." Hopkins had no choice but to sail a 100-mile stretch of coast, looking for deals. Worse, he didn't understand local customs, which depended on gifts, tributes and bribes. The trade, which dragged on for months, "involved an exchange of courtesies, gifts and negotiations," says Campbell. "You had to establish your credentials and character before trade actually began." By mid-December, Hopkins had purchased 23 slaves. But the trading went slowly. Hopkins gave King Fodolgo Talko and his officers two barrels of rum and a keg of snuff. It wasn't enough. The next day, he gave another leader and his men two casks of rum. On Dec. 23, he met with the king beneath a tree. He gave him 75 gallons of rum and received a cow as a present. The next day



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trading resumed, and Hopkins offered another 112 gallons of rum. He got one slave.

Later that day, the king demanded more rum, tobacco, iron and sugar for himself, his son and other officials.

Rhode Island captains spent an average of four months on the African coast; it took Hopkins nine.

"Hopkins was inexperienced as a slaver," says Campbell. "You wanted to get in and out as quickly as possible. As long as a slave ship was close to land, there was a danger of insurrection. Moreover, you die when you're on the West African coast. You're being exposed to diseases like malaria and yellow fever. Your slaves and crews start to die."

On June 8, Hopkins logged his most successful day of trading - 12 slaves. That same day, one of his earlier captives hanged herself between the decks of the *Sally*.

* * *

Now, as Hopkins crossed a cruel stretch of ocean called the Middle Passage, death came almost daily.

"3 women Slaves Dyed," Hopkins wrote in his trade book on Oct. 1. The ink had hardly dried when, a day later, he wrote: "3 men Slaves and 2 women Slaves - Dyed."

On Oct. 3, "1 garle Slave Dyed."

The family clock of Adm. Esek Hopkins sits today in an office in University Hall at Brown University, which was Rhode Island College at the time. The first building on campus, it was built using slave labor. The clock was presented by his granddaughter Elizabeth Angell in 1855.

In a letter to the Browns, Hopkins blamed the deaths on the failed slave revolt. The survivors were "so dispirited," he wrote, that "some drowned themselves, some starved and others sickened and died."

But the rate at which the Africans died "suggests an epidemic disease," probably smallpox or dysentery, says Campbell.

Amoebic dysentery, carried through fecal-tainted water, was spread by the filthy conditions below slave ship decks. It caused violent diarrhea, dehydration and death. Traders called it the "bloody flux."

The remaining Africans aboard the *Sally* were in a "very sickly and disordered manner," Hopkins wrote to the Browns when he arrived in Antigua. The emaciated slaves, fed a gruel made of rice, fetched poor prices; some sold for as little as 4 to 6 English pounds.

By the time Hopkins returned to Newport, he had lost 109 Africans. For most investors, a 15 percent loss of life was an acceptable risk; Hopkins lost more than half of his human cargo. And, the Browns lost the equivalent of \$10,000 on the voyage, says Campbell. "The debacle represented a turning point for three of the brothers -Nicholas, Joseph and Moses- who thereafter left the trade for good," says Campbell. "It would be nice to say that they quit because of moral qualms, but there isn't much evidence to support that, at least initially. More likely, they simply concluded that [slavery](#) was too risky an



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investment."

John invested in additional slave voyages -between four and eight more- and became a defender of the trade.

His younger brother, Moses, took another path.

Depressed, unable to sleep, he avoided the family counting house. In 1773 -eight years after the *Sally's* voyage- he freed his six slaves. He was sure his wife's death was the result of his role in the trade.

Joining other [Quakers](#), Moses declared war on New England's slavers.

One of his first targets was his older brother, [John Brown](#).

March 16, Thursday: In [Providence, Rhode Island's](#) "ProJo," the [Providence Journal](#), Paul Davis's series about the days of [slavery](#) and the [international slave trade](#) continued:

Brown vs. Brown: Brothers Go Head to Head

In 1770, the Rev. Samuel Hopkins preached his first sermon against [slavery](#) and the slave trade, calling them terrible sins. His message surprised church members, some of them slave traders. One family left the church. The notion that slavery was immoral was slow to take hold.

The [Quakers](#) were among the first to question the practice and, in 1773, they asked members to free their slaves. Not everyone agreed. Wealthy businessman Abraham Redwood and even a long-term [Rhode Island](#) governor refused to free their slaves and were disowned by the group.

Although the Quakers would help federal officials prosecute slave traders in the 1790s, they were seen as a quirky fringe group. A century earlier, the Puritans in Boston hanged Quakers and Roger Williams called them heretics.

* * *

By 1797, [John Brown](#) had burned the British ship *Gaspee*, co-founded [Providence's](#) first bank, sent a trade ship to China and laid the cornerstone of Brown University's administration building.

He was, says a biographer, one of America's leading merchants. But the federal government had other words for him: illegal slave trader. Agents seized his ship, the *Hope*, for violating the U.S. Slave Trade Act of 1794. Brown was the first Rhode Islander -possibly the first citizen in the new nation- to be tried under the law which forbid the trading of slaves in foreign ports.

On Aug. 5, in District Court in [Newport](#), Judge Benjamin Bourn outlined the reasons for seizing the *Hope*. Brown and others had "fitted, equipped, loaded, and prepared" the ship that sailed from Providence to Africa and on to Havana "for the purpose of carrying on a trade and traffic in Slaves" which was contrary to the Statute of the United States, Judge Bourn wrote.

Federal authorities learned of John Brown's activities from his



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own brother [Moses Brown](#) and other anti-slavery radicals. John and Moses had been at odds over the slave trade for more than a decade. Moses, in fact, had helped push for the federal law after an earlier state law to stop the trade was not enforced.

Now, in the late 1790s, the Providence Abolition Society was suing merchants for breaking the federal law. The group's strategy was a simple one: if the slavers agreed to quit the trade, they would drop their suits.

John Brown, one of America's leading merchants in the late 1700s, vigorously fought government efforts to end the slave trade. Moses Brown, a devout Quaker after quitting the slave trade, was an abolitionist who pressed the government to end slavery.

One of Providence's biggest slave traders, Cyprian Sterry, buckled under the group's pressure, and agreed to stop selling Africans.

But John wouldn't.

After months of out-of-court wrangling, the two sides failed to reach an agreement.

In court, John lost one round but won another.

The judge decreed that the *Hope*, along with "her tackle, furniture, apparel and other appurtances" be sold at an India Point auction on Aug. 26.

But, in a second court appearance, John triumphed over the abolitionists. In Newport, the center of the state slave trade, jurors were reluctant to convict a vocal defender of the African trade.

In a 1798 letter to his son James, John Brown said he had won a verdict for costs against his prosecutors whom he called a "Wicked and abominable Combination."

The state's anti-slavery foes, he said, were "Running Round in the Rain.... I tell them they had better be Contented to Stop ware they are, as the Further they go the wors they will fail." It wasn't the first time John Brown clashed with his brother and Rhode Island's other slavery foes.

And it wouldn't be the last.

* * *

The two brothers did not always quarrel.

As young men, they learned the sea trade and manufacturing from their uncle Obadiah. With their brothers Joseph and Nicholas, they formed a family firm, Nicholas Brown and Company in 1762. The brothers shipped goods to the West Indies, made candles from the oil of sperm whales and later produced pig iron at Hope Furnace in Scituate.

Each man brought a different skill to the partnership. Nicholas was methodical and plodding, John was bold and reckless, Joseph was a good technician and Moses was erudite, says Brown family biographer James B. Hedges.

In 1764, the four brothers invested in their first slave voyage. It was a financial disaster; more than half of the slaves died before they could be sold in the West Indies. The Browns never



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financed another slave trip together. But John, anxious to expand his business interests, struck out on his own. In 1769, he outfitted another slave ship to Africa. The family dynamic changed forever.

* * *

After the death of his wife and a daughter, Moses embraced the spiritual beliefs of the Quakers. In 1773, following their example, he freed the six slaves he owned and relinquished his interest in four others who worked at the family's candle works. He invited his family and several Quakers to hear his explanation. "Whereas I am clearly convinced that the buying and selling of men of what color soever as slaves is contrary to the Divine Mind," he began, "I do therefore ... set free the following negroes being all I am possessed of or any ways interested in." Moses promised to oversee the education of the youngest slaves and he gave each of the men the use of an acre of land from his farm. Consider me a friend, he told them. For generations, the Browns had been [Baptist](#) ministers and churchmen. But a year after he freed his slaves, Moses officially converted to Quakerism. He was sure his wife Anna's death in 1773 was God's way of punishing him for his role in the slave trade.

Almost immediately, he and other Quakers began prodding local and federal lawmakers to ban both slavery and the slave trade. In 1774, the General Assembly passed a law prohibiting the importation of slaves into Rhode Island, an amended version of a bill advanced by Moses Brown that would have ended the slave trade altogether. In fact, it included a loophole that allowed slaves who could not be sold elsewhere to be brought into Rhode Island for one year. In addition, the proposed fines for importing slaves were omitted.

The "law proved totally ineffectual," says historian Christy Millard Nadalin.

The Brown family's influence is still evident on Providence's East Side from the stately family mansions to the university that bears their name. The institution's first building was built by slaves.

The first act calling for the freeing of slaves in Rhode Island came in 1784. But the General Assembly did not want it done quickly. Under the act, children born to slave mothers after March 1, 1784 would be free when they became adults. The law, says Nadalin, "required no real sacrifice on the part of the slave owners, and it did nothing to curb the actual trade in slaves."

In 1787, the General Assembly made it illegal for any Rhode Islander to be involved in the African slave trade – the first such law in America. But, again, it was ignored; in the next three years, 25 ships sailed to Africa. Two years later, Moses Brown, the Rev. Samuel Hopkins of Newport, and about 180 others organized the Abolition Society. Its mission, according to J. Stanley Lemons, history professor at Rhode Island College, was to enforce the laws against the slave trade.



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* * *

Just as the abolitionists were organizing, a bitter attack against them erupted in the Providence Gazette.

The society, a critic wrote, was "created not to ruin only one good citizen but to ruin many hundreds within the United States" who have all or part of their property in slaves and the slave trade.

These people you are calling "Negro-dealers" and "kidnappers" are some of the "very best men" in Rhode Island, he wrote.

"This traffic, strange as it appears to the conscientious Friend or Quaker, is right, just and lawful, and consequently practiced every day."

The diatribe was signed "A Citizen."

It was John Brown.

Brother Moses and other abolitionists responded, accusing John and other defenders of slavery as selfish, ignorant and pitiful. Moses publicly refuted a number of the "Citizen's" arguments, including the assertion that Africans were better off as slaves in America because they would have been killed back home.

The "Citizen" had his facts wrong, Moses countered. But if his argument were right, wouldn't it be an even greater act of humanity to grant the captives their freedom after arriving in America?

The battle was the "most bitter and unrestrained controversy" in the state's early history, says Moses Brown biographer Mack Thompson. What started as a discussion about the pros and cons of the slave trade "soon degenerated into an acrimonious debate in which politics and personalities became the main subject." Moses eventually withdrew from the public debate.

But, privately, he continued to plead for an end to the state's slave trade. "Confronted with public apathy, inefficient state officials, and the power of the slave traders," Moses and his fellow abolitionists had little impact, says biographer Thompson.

Moses couldn't even convince his own brother that slave trading was evil. So he and others turned to U.S. Attorney Ray Greene, who dragged John and other slave traders into court.

John lost his ship but never publicly apologized.

* * *

In 1800, two years after he was elected to Congress, John Brown was one of only five congressmen to vote against a bill to strengthen the 1794 law under which he had been prosecuted.

Speaking against the measure, he offered three familiar arguments. First, he said, it was wrong to deny to American citizens the benefits of a trade that was open to Europeans. Second, the trade was not immoral because the condition of those enslaved was "much bettered." Finally, he argued that the trade would bring much-desired revenue to the nation's treasury.

"Why should a heavy fine and imprisonment be made the penalty for carrying on a trade so advantageous?" he asked.

The abolitionist Moses, meanwhile, joined Samuel Slater and made cloth in a mill in Pawtucket. They made clothes from cotton



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picked by slaves on plantations in the South.

* * *

John Brown never changed his mind about profits and slavery, says Joaquina Bela Teixeira, executive director of the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society in Providence. "His sense of morality never shifted." He tried to fix tobacco prices and filed false insurance claims, she says, "yet he's touted as one of Providence's patriots."

But the Browns "aren't big slave traders," says James Campbell, history professor at Brown University.

They play a big role in the state's slave trading history, in part, because they are major historical figures, kept meticulous records and have a name linked to a major university.

"Slavery was a fact of life. Yet, what is compelling about that late 18th-century moment is that you get this new moral sensibility. At some point, people acted against the slave trade. Not everyone did, and not everyone acted at the same time. But through the Browns you can see these deep historical currents" that ran through the era, Campbell says.

It's also important to understand that, despite their public arguments, the two brothers cared about each other, Campbell says.

"In private correspondence, they are very frank with one another. My sense is that they loved one another. In one letter, Moses says, 'John, I'm doing this for you.'"

March 17, Friday: In Providence, Rhode Island's "ProJo," the Providence Journal, Paul Davis's series about the days of slavery and the international slave trade concluded:

Living Off the Trade: Bristol and the DeWolfs

Rhode Island outlawed slave trading in 1787, but it didn't stop the trafficking. Almost half of all of Rhode Island's slave voyages occurred after trading was outlawed. By the end of the 18th century, Bristol surpassed Newport as the busiest slave port in Rhode Island.

In 1807, the United States Congress, after a bitter debate, banished the slave trade and Rhode Island's 75-year reign sputtered to an end.

Rhode Island's rum mills were gradually replaced by cotton mills. Bristol was broke, Newport was struggling and Providence merchants turned to manufacturing.

* * *

Samuel Bosworth was scared.

He was ordered to buy a ship at auction to keep it out of the hands of its owner, Charles DeWolf, one of Bristol's biggest slave traders.

Federal officials had just seized the *Lucy*, which they were sure DeWolf planned to send to Africa on a slave voyage – a clear violation of a 1794 law that prohibited Americans from fitting



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out vessels "for the purpose of carrying on any trade or traffic in slaves, to any foreign country."

U.S. Treasury officials wanted to send a message to Rhode Island's slavers so they instructed Bosworth, a government port surveyor, to outbid competitors. In the past, slave traders caught violating the law simply repurchased their ships at auction, often at a fraction of their value.

Keeping the *Lucy* from DeWolf would not be popular.

Charles and his brothers had prospered from trafficking in human cargo since the 1780s and the town's residents depended on them for their livelihood. Bristol's craftsmen made iron chains, sails and rope for the slave ships; farmers grew onions and distillers made rum – all items needed to support the trade. The night before the auction, three of Rhode Island's wealthiest men appeared at Bosworth's home. Charles and James DeWolf and [John Brown](#), a Providence merchant who had just been elected to Congress, warned Bosworth not to go, saying it was not part of his job as a surveyor. But Bosworth had little choice. He had been pressured by William Ellery, Newport's zealous customs collector, a "straight-gazing patriot" who had signed the Declaration of Independence 23 years earlier. Although his father had been a slave trader, Ellery regarded smuggling slaves as "nothing short of treason," writes George Howe, a DeWolf descendant.

On the morning of the auction, July 25, 1799, Charles DeWolf approached Bosworth a second time. If he tried to buy the *Lucy*, he would likely be "insulted if not thrown off the wharf by some of the sailors," DeWolf warned.

Bosworth continued on his way. But he never reached the town wharf.

As he neared the *Lucy*, eight men in Indian garb and painted faces grabbed him and pushed him into a sailboat. The black-faced men sailed Bosworth around Ferry Point and dumped him at the foot of Mount Hope, two miles from the auction site. With Bosworth out of the way, a DeWolf captain bought the *Lucy* for \$738. "The government had found the slave traders more than a match on their home turf, and never tried the tactic again," says historian Jay Coughtry.

The DeWolfs were just getting started.

* * *

Already, the clan owned a piece of Bristol's waterfront.

The brothers William and James DeWolf operated from a wharf and a three-story brick counting house on Thames Street, overlooking the harbor.

At the turn of the century, the family founded the Bank of Bristol, chartered with \$50,000 in capital. Among the chief stockholders in 1803 were two generations of DeWolfs – John, Charles, James, William, George and Levi. The clan also started the Mount-Hope Insurance Co., which insured their own slave ships.

When slave merchant James DeWolf traveled to Washington as a senator, he rode in the ornate carriage that is kept at Linden



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Place, in Bristol, the George DeWolf family mansion.
Business was good.

Before the American Revolution, Newport merchants dominated the slave trade. But from 1789 to 1793, nearly a third of Rhode Island's slave ships sailed from Bristol. By 1800, Bristol surpassed Newport as the busiest slave port. The DeWolfs financed 88 slaving voyages from 1784 to 1807 – roughly a quarter of all Rhode Island slave trips during that period. Alone, or with other investors, the family was responsible for nearly 60 percent of all African voyages that began in Bristol.

"This will inform you of my arrival in this port safe, with seventy-eight well slaves," wrote Jeremiah Diman to James DeWolf on April 1, 1796. Writing from St. Thomas, Diman said he'd lost two slaves on the voyage from Africa, and promised to leave soon for Havana to sell the others. "I shall do the best I can, and without other orders, load with molasses and return to Bristol." The DeWolfs owned five plantations in Cuba –among them the Mary Ann, the New Hope and the Esperanza– where their slaves grew sugar cane and coffee. The DeWolfs also brought some slaves back to Bristol, where they were "sold to some of the best families in the state," says historian Charles O.F. Thompson. In 1803, James DeWolf gave his wife an African boy and girl for Christmas.

* * *

They were self-made men. The DeWolf family crest, shown here as painted on the door of the carriage, above. Too poor to stay in school, they took jobs on ships. Their father, Mark Anthony DeWolf, was a slaver and a seaman, too. But he never made any money from it.

He married the daughter of wealthy privateer Simeon Potter, moved from Guadeloupe to Bristol and sailed on Potter's ships. After years of scrambling to make a living, he died, broke, of a "nervous fever" in 1793.

Between voyages he sired 15 children. Three of his sons died at sea. But five –James, John, Charles, William and Levi– survived. The "Quakerish" Levi quit the slave trade after a single voyage, but the others prospered from the trade, privateering, whaling and other ventures.

Each son worked a different part of the family business. Charles, the oldest, acted as the family's financial consultant. William ran the Mount-Hope Insurance Company, which insured ships and their cargoes against "the dangers of the seas, of fire, enemies, pirates, assailing thieves, restraints and detainments of kings ... and all other losses and misfortunes." Ships and their cargoes were insured at up to \$7,000.

In 1804, Henry DeWolf moved to South Carolina to handle the family's slave sales in Charleston. The move was typical; the family placed relatives or in-laws in every part of their slaving enterprise from Bristol to Cuba.

At the urging of the DeWolfs, Congressman John Brown helped establish Bristol and Warren as a separate customs district where slave traders could operate away from "the prying eyes" of William Ellery in Newport, says Coughtry. A few years later,



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the family successfully lobbied President Thomas Jefferson to name Charles Collins, a slave trader and DeWolf cousin, as head of the new district. Collins had been captain of the seized ship, the Lucy.

The family's hold was now complete.

From 1804 to 1807, the prosecution of slave traders ceased, and the number of Africa-bound ships from Bristol soared.

"The DeWolf family monopolized the slave trade," says Kevin E. Jordan, a retired professor at Roger Williams University.

To keep an eye on their trade, the DeWolfs built huge homes near the harbor. Charles hired ship carpenters to build the Mansion House on Thames Street before 1785. It had four entrances, with broad halls running north to south and east to west. Wallpaper in the drawing room featured exotic birds with brilliant plumage.

Two decades later, James hired architect Russell Warren to build The Mount, a white three-story home with five chimneys, a deer park and a glass-enclosed cupola. Each day, his wife's slave washed the teak floors with tea leaves. In 1810, George hired Warren to design a \$60,000 mansion with fluted Corinthian columns, a three-story spiral staircase and a skylight. The estate is now referred to as Linden Place.

* * *

James DeWolf was the most extraordinary of the brothers. His life, says historian Wilfred H. Munro, resembled "the wildest chapters of a romance." Born in Bristol in 1764, he boarded Revolutionary War ships as a boy, and was held prisoner by the British in Bermuda. The cruelty and hardship he experienced as a young prisoner "made him a man of force and indomitable energy with no nice ethical distinctions," says one biographer.

In his early 20s, he sailed aboard the slave ship Providence, owned by John Brown; he bought his own slave ship, a 40-ton schooner, in 1788.

Tall, with gray-blue eyes, he had big sailor's hands – and a Midas touch, says Munro.

While his fellow merchants "were cautiously weighing the possible chances of success in ventures in untried fields, he was accustomed to rush boldly in, sweep away the rich prizes that so often await a pioneer, and leave for those who followed him only the moderate gains that ordinary business affords," writes Munro.

Some called his boldness cruel.

In 1791, a grand jury charged James with murdering a slave aboard a bark the year before. The woman, who had smallpox, had to be jettisoned before she contaminated the other slaves and crew, some sailors testified in his defense. But jurors said the slave ship captain did not have "the fear of God before his eyes." Instead, he was "moved and seduced by the instigation of the Devil" when he threw the woman from his ship. She "instantly sank, drowned and died ..." the jury said.

Although an arrest warrant was issued, the federal marshal from Newport reported twice annually that he couldn't find James.



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After four years, the charge was dropped. Whether James was in Bristol during these years or, as one historian writes, hiding out in the Danish West Indies, is unclear.

It wasn't the only time James flouted the law. After it became illegal to sell slaves in foreign lands, he and his captains disguised their mission by equipping their ships with slave quarters after they left Rhode Island waters. Others simply sailed past Newport in the dark.

James DeWolf, left, served as a senator while he profited from the trade; William, center, ran the Mount-Hope Insurance Company that insured the slave traders' ships and Charles, right, the oldest son, was the family's financial consultant.

Before he turned 25, James had accumulated considerable wealth. His 1790 marriage to Nancy, the daughter of Deputy Gov. William Bradford, brought him more money. During the War of 1812, he sent out his own 18-gun brig with the government's blessing and captured 40 British vessels worth more than \$5 million, says Ray Battcher III, curator of the Bristol Historical & Preservation Society.

He emerged, according to Battcher, as one of the richest men in the United States.

When the federal government ran low on credit, James DeWolf loaned the nation money.

He built the Arkwright Mills in Coventry, where workers made cloth from cotton grown by southern slaves. He also converted some of his ships into whalers, took up farming and traded with China.

In his late 30s, he entered politics. In 1802, he won a seat in the state legislature and later became speaker of the House. Locally, he was town moderator. In 1821, he went to Washington to serve in the Senate.

DeWolf's reputation as a slave trader followed him.

During a Senate debate over whether Missouri should be admitted as a slave state, a senator from South Carolina noted that some Rhode Islanders opposed the move and were bitter toward slaveholders.

But such a sentiment could not be widespread, he said with sarcasm.

After all, Rhode Island voters elected James DeWolf to represent them – a man who "had accumulated an immense fortune by the slave trade."

The southern senator noted that of the 202 vessels that carried slaves to South Carolina from 1804 to 1807, 59 were from Rhode Island – and 10 belonged to DeWolf. DeWolf left the Senate before his term was up – one biographer said he was bored.

* * *

After 1807, a much stronger federal law ending the slave trade was passed, and the DeWolfs' hold on Bristol began to unravel. They moved their slaving operation to their Cuban plantations. In 1825, when George DeWolf's sugar cane crop failed, he defaulted on a business bank loan, bringing three banks to near collapse. The reverberations hit the other DeWolfs and much of



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Bristol. "The family went bankrupt. They couldn't pay the farmers" or other suppliers "so the people all went bankrupt," says Jordan. Among them was slave ship Capt. Isaac Manchester, who lost \$80,000 and turned to clamming to earn a living.

According to one account, women wept and even churches closed their doors. "General DeWolf has failed utterly!" wrote Joel Mann to his father on Dec. 12, 1825.

"All night and yesterday officers and men were flying in all directions, attacking and securing property of every description. All classes of men, even clergymen and servants, are sufferers. Many among us are stripped of everything. Honest merchants and shopkeepers have lost all or nearly all," the pastor of the Bristol Congregational Church wrote.

Although the DeWolf family was responsible for much of the early wealth of Bristol, modest homes line the street that bears their name.

"The banks are in equal distress. A director has just told me that the General is on paper in some way or other at all the banks ... The Union Bank is thought to be ruined - perhaps others."

Six months later, the directors of the Bristol Union Bank, Eagle Bank and Bank of Bristol asked the General Assembly for tax relief because DeWolf's failure had cost them more than \$130,000 in capital.

James lost money, too, but died, in 1837, a millionaire. His estate included property in Ohio, Kentucky, Maryland, New York and Bristol.

To avoid Bristol's creditors, George DeWolf left his Bristol mansion at night, just before Christmas. Eight years earlier, he had entertained President James Monroe there.

"All the creditors stormed the place and looted it," says Jordan. "They pulled out everything that wasn't nailed to the walls. They took the chandeliers from the ceilings."

October 18, Wednesday: A panel created by President Ruth Simmons of [Brown University](#) has suggested that the institution should atone for its ties to [slavery](#):

By PAM BELLUCK

BOSTON, Oct. 18 - Extensively documenting Brown University's 18th-century ties to slavery, a university committee called Wednesday for the institution to make amends by building a memorial, creating a center for the study of slavery and injustice and increasing efforts to recruit minority students, particularly from Africa and the West Indies.

The Committee on Slavery and Justice, appointed three years ago by Brown's president, Ruth J. Simmons, a great-granddaughter of slaves who is the first black president of an Ivy League institution, said in a report: "We cannot change the past. But an institution can hold itself accountable for the past, accepting its burdens and responsibilities along with its benefits and privileges."

The report added, "In the present instance this means



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acknowledging and taking responsibility for Brown's part in grievous crimes."

The committee did not call for outright reparations, an idea that has support among some African-Americans and was a controversial issue at Brown several years ago. But the committee's chairman, James T. Campbell, a history professor at Brown, said he believed the recommendations "are substantive and do indeed represent a form of repair."

The committee also recommended that the university publicly and persistently acknowledge its slave ties, including during freshmen orientation. Dr. Campbell said he believed that the recommendations, if carried out, would represent a more concrete effort than that of any other American university to make amends for ties to slavery.

"I think it is unprecedented," Dr. Campbell said, adding that a few other universities and colleges have established memorials, study programs or issued apologies, but not on the scale of the Brown recommendations. It was not clear how much the committee's recommendations would cost to carry out.

"We're not making a claim that somehow Brown is uniquely guilty," Dr. Campbell said. "I think we're making a claim that this is an aspect of our history that not anyone has fully come to terms with. This is a critical step in allowing an institution to move forward."

Even in the North, a number of universities have ties to slavery. Harvard Law School was endowed by money its founder earned selling slaves for the sugar cane fields of Antigua. And at Yale, three scholars reported in 2001 that the university relied on slave-trading money for its first scholarships, endowed professorship and library endowment.

Dr. Simmons issued a letter in response to the report, soliciting comments from the Brown community and saying she had asked for the findings to be discussed at an open forum. She declined to give her own reaction, saying, "When it is appropriate to do so, I will issue a university response to the recommendations and suggest what we might do."

She said "the committee deserves praise for demonstrating so steadfastly that there is no subject so controversial that it should not be submitted to serious study and debate."

Initial reaction to the recommendations seemed to be appreciative.

"It sounds to me like this makes sense," said Rhett S. Jones, a longtime professor of history and Africana studies at Brown. "I did not expect the committee would emerge saying, Well, you know, Brown should write a check."

"I never thought that was in the cards. I'm not sure I think it's even appropriate that a university write a check, even though it's pretty widely agreed on that Brown would not be where it is if it were not for slave money. These recommendations seem to me to be appropriate undertakings for the university."

Brown's ties to slavery are clear but also complex. The university's founder, the Rev. [James Manning](#), freed his only



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slave, but accepted donations from slave owners and traders, including the Brown family of [Providence](#), [Rhode Island](#). At least one of the Brown brothers, [John Brown](#), a treasurer of the college, was an active slave trader, but another brother, [Moses Brown](#), became a Quaker abolitionist, although he ran a textile factory that used cotton grown with slave labor.

University Hall, which houses Dr. Simmons's office, was built by a crew with at least two slaves.

"Any institution in the United States that existed prior to 1865 was entangled in slavery, but the entanglements are particularly dense in Rhode Island," Dr. Campbell said, noting that the state was the hub through which many slave ships traveled.

The issue caused friction at Brown in 2001, when the student newspaper, the Brown Daily Herald, printed a full-page advertisement produced by a conservative writer, listing "Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery Is a Bad Idea And Racist Too."

The advertisement, also run by other college newspapers, prompted protests by students who demanded that the paper pay "reparations" by donating its advertising fee or giving free advertising space to advocates of reparations.

The Brown committee was made up of 16 faculty members, students and administrators, and its research was extensive.

"The official history of Brown will have to be rewritten, entirely scrapped," said Omer Bartov, a professor on the committee who specializes in studying the Holocaust and genocide.

The report cites examples of steps taken by other universities: a memorial unveiled last year by the University of North Carolina, a five-year program of workshops and activities at Emory University, and a 2004 vote by the faculty senate of the University of Alabama to apologize for previous faculty members having whipped slaves on campus.

Katie Zezima contributed reporting.

"MAGISTERIAL HISTORY" IS FANTASIZING, HISTORY IS CHRONOLOGY



JOHN "OLDTHUNDER" BROWN

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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: May 16, 2014



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ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.



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Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary "writerly" process you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

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