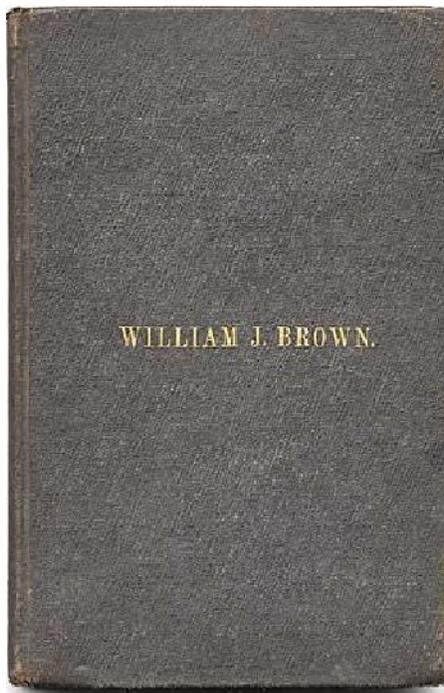


WILLIAM J. BROWN OF PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND



1766

February: The *Sally* arrived finally back in its home port in [Rhode Island](#), bringing with it the 4 “likely boys” that the Brown family had requested.¹

1. [William J. Brown](#) would relate, in his autobiography in 1883, that it had been believed in his family that his grandfather Cudge had been brought over from Africa in one of the Brown negros. Does that mean that one of these 4 “likely boys” was named Cudge? (The earliest record we have for Cudge was when he got married, in 1768, with Phillis.)

PAGE 1: I am not positive, but believe my grandfather was brought from Africa in the firm’s vessel. He had two or three brothers. One was named Thomas, and the other Sharp or Sharper Brown, and they worked for Moses Brown.

(The records for Obadiah Brown show ownership of four slaves named Cudge, Sharper, Tom, and Benno. If it is accurate that Brown’s grandfather had been one of these 4 “likely boys” brought to [Providence](#) in 1766 in the *Sally*, and if it is accurate that he had “two or three brothers,” then it would seem rather more than likely that these four –Cudge, Tom, Sharper, and Benno– had not only been brought together from Africa on the *Sally*, but were blood relatives.)



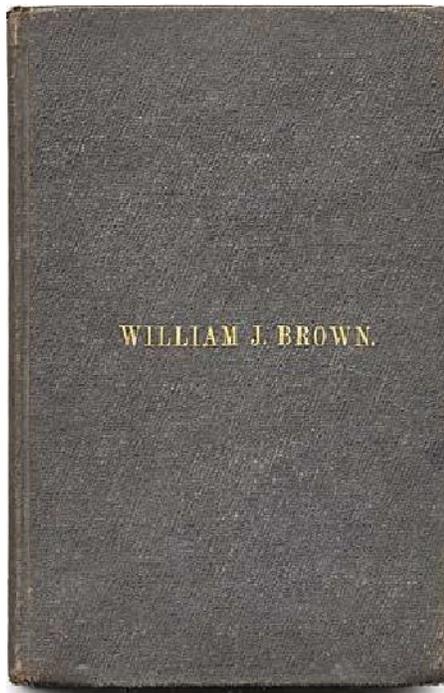
WILLIAM J. BROWN

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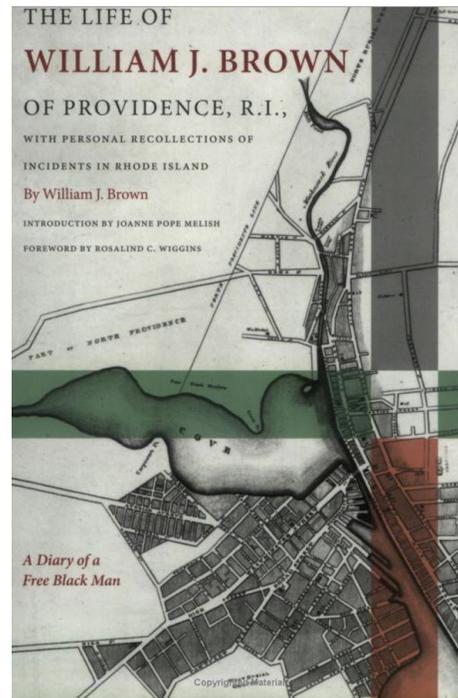
1768

November 20, Sunday: Cudge Brown, a slave of [Moses Brown](#), got married with Phillis. They would live near what is now the [Moses Brown School](#) and Providence Friends Meetinghouse on [Providence's East Side](#). Their grandson [William J. Brown](#) would make a record of this family history in his autobiography, THE LIFE OF [WILLIAM J. BROWN](#), OF [PROVIDENCE](#), R.I.; WITH PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF INCIDENTS IN [RHODE ISLAND](#), a book that would be published in [Rhode Island](#) in 1883, and then republished in 1971, and then again, this time in paperback, in 2006:

PAGES 32-35: My grandfather was married to Phillis, November 20th, 1768, and they went to keeping house, living in one towards the north end of Olney street, owned by Mr. Brown, where he kept his teams. Newport, his oldest son, was born April 22d, 1769. Rhoda, his oldest daughter, was born September 27th, 1776, and Noah, my father, was born September 20th, 1781. James was born November 17th, 1788....²



1ST EDITION



3D EDITION

2. The cover of the paperback would refer to this volume as "A DIARY OF A FREE BLACK MAN." [William J. Brown](#), whose ancestry was not only African (Cudge Brown and Phillis) but also native American (Thomas Prophet), did not consider himself a black man but rather a man of color. It should be pointed out, also, that his thrice-published writing, like the memoir of Benjamin Franklin, was not ever a "DIARY" nor even based upon such a record, but instead qualifies as a late-life "autobiography" or "memoir" created directly for publication.



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

1805



December 25, Wednesday: Johann Philipp Karl, Count Stadion-Warthausen was named Lord Chamberlain and Chancellor to Emperor Franz I of Austria.

Dalmatia was attached to the Republic of Italy.

Brixen and Trent were removed from Austrian rule and attached to Bavaria.

In [Cranston](#), Noah Brown and Alice Prophet Greene, a widow, got married and would create a black and red mixed-race [Rhode Island](#) family. One of their sons, [William J. Brown](#), would eventually place this day on record in his autobiography, THE LIFE OF WILLIAM J. BROWN, OF PROVIDENCE, R.I.; WITH PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF INCIDENTS IN RHODE ISLAND:

PAGES 32-35: My father married Alice Greene; her maiden name was Alice Prophet. She was a widow, having lost her husband, Uriah Greene, several years previous to her second marriage. They were married in Cranston, R. I., the 25th of December, 1805, and commenced keeping house in that town, but being engaged in a seafaring life, he removed to Providence, and rented a house of Dr. Pardon Bowen, situated on Wells street. During his residence in Cranston, he had a son born, July 10th, 1810, and named him Joseph George Washington Brown. My sister, Mary Alice, was born September 1811, in this city. My brother George was born September 23d, 1817. After residing in Dr. Pardon Bowen's house five years, we were obliged to move, as Mr. Bowen wished to make a strawberry bed in the garden where the house was located. My father hired a house called the Red Lion, near the junction of South Main and Power streets, on the north side, the place where the Amateur Dramatic Hall now stands. My brother Henry was born there in 1820....

My mother, as I stated, was a widow when she was married to my father. I never had any knowledge respecting her first husband's relations. My mother's relations were the Prophets, who belonged to the Narragansett tribe, and resided in Cranston. My grandmother's father was a man of note and one of the chiefs, and called, Grandfather Jeffery. Whether he was a prophet by name or by title I know not. He had two daughters, but whether he had any sons I know not, but think he had none. One of grandfather Jeffery's daughters married a white man, preferring civilized to savage life. The other daughter, my grandmother, purchased a colored man and married him, by whom she had five children, one son and four daughters, John, Phebe, Mary, Alice, and Eunice. Her father being very much displeased with her management, gave his effects to the first, who married the white man, and the fourth generation are living in the city at present, and moving in upper circles. After some years his anger abated



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

towards his daughter's husband and he rendered some aid to the family....

1808

 [William J. Brown](#) would allege, when he would publish his autobiography in 1883, that in this year the [Rhode Island](#) General Assembly had enacted a "General Emancipation" law, by which those who were still [enslaved](#) in that state were offered their freedom while those who turned down that offer of freedom were to be maintained out of the property of their owner when they should come in old age or illness "to want" or to need "assistance." That of course would be a false memory: no legislation even remotely resembling this had actually been enacted during this Year of Our Lord six years prior to Brown's birth. All such matters were handled, always, in the best interest of the white people, with the best interest of the people of color being at best a distant second consideration. The question arises, however, of how this grandson of a slave came to form such a false appreciation of the history of his state. The explanation would seem to be that during this year some provisions had been made, to balance out the responsibility of civil government versus the responsibility of the private white slavemaster, for the maintenance of emancipated slaves who had subsequently become burdensome. Professor Joanne Pope Melish explains this delicate matter in a precise manner:



Brown's version provides a fascinating glimpse of how public policy concerning slavery ... could be represented quite differently to slaves by their owners, or could have consequences that would lead slaves to interpret it quite differently. 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 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



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

“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.

1814

➡ November 10, Thursday: The Russian commander, Prince Repnin, who had reason to anticipate that he was going to receive Poland in return, turned over the administration of Saxony to Prussia and began the evacuation of his troops.

[William J. Brown](#) was born into a free black family in [Providence, Rhode Island](#). His grandfather Cudge had worked as a teamster for [Friend Moses Brown](#) before being [manumitted](#) by Moses on November 10, 1773.



➡ His father was a sailor who had previously worked on Moses’s farm, and his mother was the daughter of a black slave and a Narragansett woman. William would become a sailor, a shoe repairman, a Baptist minister, and a leader in Providence’s black community. Here are some entries from his autobiography:

PAGES 5-11: My father’s name was Noah Brown; his father was Cudge Brown and his mother Phillis Brown. Grandfather Brown was born in Africa, and belonged to a firm (named Brown Brothers) consisting of four, named respectively, Joseph, John, Nicholas and Moses Brown. They held slaves together, each brother selecting out such as they wished for house service; the rest of the slaves to perform out-door labor. I am not positive, but believe my grandfather was brought from Africa in the firm’s vessel. He had two or three brothers. One was named Thomas, and the other Sharp or Sharper Brown, and they worked for Moses



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Brown. My grandfather was occupied as a teamster, doing the team work for two farms, the one on which Mr. Brown lived, and the other to the northward towards Swan Point Road.

PAGES 32-35: My grandfather was married to Phillis, November 20th, 1768, and they went to keeping house, living in one towards the north end of Olney street, owned by Mr. Brown, where he kept his teams. Newport, his oldest son, was born April 22d, 1769. Rhoda, his oldest daughter, was born September 27th, 1776, and Noah, my father, was born September 20th, 1781. James was born November 17th, 1788....

My father married Alice Greene; her maiden name was Alice Prophet. She was a widow, having lost her husband, Uriah Greene, several years previous to her second marriage. They were married in Cranston, R. I., the 25th of December, 1805, and commenced keeping house in that town, but being engaged in a seafaring life, he removed to Providence, and rented a house of Dr. Pardon Bowen, situated on Wells street. During his residence in Cranston, he had a son born, July 10th, 1810, and named him Joseph George Washington Brown. My sister, Mary Alice, was born September 1811, in this city. My brother George was born September 23d, 1817. After residing in Dr. Pardon Bowen's house five years, we were obliged to move, as Mr. Bowen wished to make a strawberry bed in the garden where the house was located. My father hired a house called the Red Lion, near the junction of South Main and Power streets, on the north side, the place where the Amateur Dramatic Hall now stands. My brother Henry was born there in 1820....

My mother, as I stated, was a widow when she was married to my father. I never had any knowledge respecting her first husband's relations. My mother's relations were the Prophets, who belonged to the Narragansett tribe, and resided in Cranston. My grandmother's father was a man of note and one of the chiefs, and called, Grandfather Jeffery. Whether he was a prophet by name or by title I know not. He had two daughters, but whether he had any sons I know not, but think he had none. One of grandfather Jeffery's daughters married a white man, preferring civilized to savage life. The other daughter, my grandmother, purchased a colored man and married him, by whom she had five children, one son and four daughters, John, Phebe, Mary, Alice, and Eunice. Her father being very much displeased with her management, gave his effects to the first, who married the white man, and the fourth generation are living in the city at present, and moving in upper circles. After some years his anger abated towards his daughter's husband and he rendered some aid to the family....

Pages 40-51: The house which my father rented [was] located in the south part of the town, near the water. It was a gambrel roofed house, painted with plain boards like clapboards, and painted red.... On the west side was a door and two windows, one over the other, and two doors on the north side, one leading into the cellar, the other into the back yard, with two windows



WILLIAM J. BROWN

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the same as in front. The inside of the house was arranged as follow: two rooms on the first floor, the largest used for a kitchen, the other for a sitting room or bed room. Adjoining us on the east was a sailor boarding house kept by Mr. James Axum. From our east window could be seen a fine garden filled with various kind of vegetables belonging to Mr. Axum. There were two rooms upstairs arranged the same as below, having access by a stair-way in a small entry three feet by six, on the north side of the west room. When we first moved in we occupied the upper rooms, until the family below could vacate their rooms, which was some six months after we moved in. Two rooms was considered quite a genteel tenement in these days for a family of six, especially if they were colored, the prevailing opinion being that they had no business with a larger house than one or two rooms. The family occupying the lower floor of our house were considered the upper crust of the colored population, Mr. Thomas Reed by name, by trade a barber, and kept a fashionable shaving saloon....

He was responsible for the rent to Mr. Tillinghast and other heirs, to whom it belonged. It was forty dollars per year. There being more room than he needed or could afford to pay for, he rented the upper part for fifteen dollars per year; which reduced his rent to twenty-five dollars. The landlords received their rents quarterly. Every one knew, in those days that a man having a family of six could not pay the rent of four rooms, unless he robbed or went on the highway to get a living....

(We can see in the above the reality that lay behind Frederick Douglass's observation that in certain respects people of color in the antebellum northern society had moved from being the slaves of individuals to becoming "slaves of the community.")

In [Newport, Rhode Island](#), [Friend Stephen Wanton Gould](#) wrote something in his journal that has not been completely decipherable:

5 day 10th of 11 M / Omitted Meeting & went down The Neck to attend in surveying a peace of Land at the request of an old acquaintance who is involved in a Law Suit pending in the Court [?] is setting - I understood there were two appearances in the ministry at Meeting [?] they were edifying to [?]

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

1821

 Friend [Moses Brown](#) wrote A SHORT HISTORY OF THE AFRICAN UNION MEETING AND SCHOOL-HOUSE ERECTED IN PROVIDENCE... (32 pages, printed by Brown & Danforth in Providence). Although he had donated land atop the hill in [Providence, Rhode Island](#), he had rather that his name have been omitted from this document as published, “as I don’t approve of Singing Meetings and some other parts yet if it suit the Coloured people I shall not oppose them.”

AME

Moses Brown

 November 10, Saturday: The constitutional convention of the State of New York abolished nearly all property qualifications for voting. The remaining restrictions were upon voting by non-adult citizens, by non-male citizens, and it goes without saying, by non-white citizens (but hey, progress is progress).

In [Providence, Rhode Island](#), [William J. Brown](#) was seven years old — and so, as a black boy, it was time for him to get out there in the big world and make his own way:

PAGE 26: The colored people called a meeting in 1819 to take measures, to build a meetinghouse, with a basement for a school room. After appointing their Committee to carry out their wishes, they sent a special committee to Mr. [Moses Brown](#), to inform him of their intentions and see what he would do toward aiding them, knowing he belonged to the Society of Friends and was a very benevolent man, besides some of the members of the committee had been in his service. Mr. Brown, after hearing their statements, highly commended their movement, and said, “I always had it in my heart to help the colored people, whenever I saw they were ready to receive. Now go and select you out a lot, suitable for your purpose, and I will pay for it.”

PAGE 25: Preparations were being made to open a school in the vestry of our new meeting house, which was just finished. This building was commenced in 1819, but for the want of funds it was not finished until 1821, two years after its commencement. Prior to this time, the people had no place of worship of their own, and were obliged to attend the white people’s churches. Some attended the Congregational church, Rev. James Wilson, pastor; some attended the Methodist church; some attended the Episcopal church, Dr. Crocker, pastor; a few attended the Unitarian church, Rev. Mr. Cady, pastor; and a large number attended the First Baptist church, Dr. Gano, pastor. Some were members of each of the above named churches; the largest number, however, were Baptists, and belonged to the First Baptist Church, but many attended no church at all, because they said they were opposed to going to churches and sitting in pigeon holes, as all



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

the churches at that time had some obscure place for the colored people to sit in.³

PAGES 86-88: After we had taken the lower tenement of the house, mother said to me one day, that it was my birthday; "that I was born on the 10th of November, and was seven years old, and it was commonly stated that the boy at seven years is old enough to earn his own living, but, I think seven years is too young, but I want you to remember when your birthday comes." And from that day forth I have never forgotten it....

In the Fall I waited anxiously for my birthday to come. I kept run of the months and days until the time came, and had the pleasure of telling mother that that was my birthday. I was eight years old. That was the time mother said a boy was capable of earning his own living, in her opinion. I tired to make myself useful by running errands and doing work around the house that mother wanted done. I frequently went out with brother Joseph, who was four years older than myself. He was a stout, thick-set boy, and often got into trouble with other boys....

Mother had a task to keep brother in his place, as he was twelve years old, and father was away to sea. Soon Mr. Eaton, a gentleman from Framingham, a relative of Judge Staples's wife, wanted a boy, and hearing of brother Joseph, came to see mother about him. He made an agreement to take him a year on trial, for his victuals, clothes and schooling, and he went home with Mr. Eaton on trial for a year. After he left home my services were required doing chores around the house, cutting wood, etc. This was before hard coal was brought in use in Providence, and every one burned wood, which cost four or five dollars a cord....

About this time some ladies opened a free school for colored youth ...I was large enough to go into the lowest class. A semi-circle was painted in front of the teacher's desk. When the class was called each scholar had to toe the circle. It extended across the room and would accommodate some twelve children, who stood front of the teacher to read and spell, the teacher remaining at her desk.... After speaking my piece and making a low bow, I descended from the stand, as I had been instructed to do by Miss Latham. I spoke it to her satisfaction, and the praise and admiration of all present, who declared that I was to be a great man, and if the necessary measures were taken, there was no doubt but that I would be of great use to my people; but that was the winding up of this school. Preparations were being made to open a school in the vestry of our new meeting house, which was just finished....

The house was finished in 1821. The committee lost some time in trying to find a teacher, to instruct the school under the Lancasterian plan. After searching in vain they procured a white

3. Note well what Brown indicates clearly, that although "a few attended the Unitarian church," at this point there were zero persons of color who were willing to seat themselves in the "pigeon hole" loft that the Quakers of Providence had provided for the colored in their meetinghouse on Main Street at the foot of Meeting Street. This explains why in 1822 in a renovation of the Quaker meetinghouse, Friend Moses Brown would report that "what was called the Negros Gallery" had been removed. (The Negros Gallery or pigeon loft remains in existence in the meetinghouse in Saylesville, Rhode Island: go and look.)



WILLIAM J. BROWN

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gentleman by the name of Mr. Ormsbee, to teach them. The school was opened in the vestry, but not a free school, the price of tuition being \$1.50 per quarter. The colored people sent their children and they soon had the number of 125 scholars... Colored teachers were very rarely to be found, and it was difficult to procure a white teacher, as it was considered a disgraceful employment to be a teacher of colored children and still more disgraceful to have colored children in white schools....

At that time the colored people had little or no protection. It was thought a disgrace to plead a colored man's cause, or aid in getting his rights as a citizen, or to teach their children in schools. The teachers themselves were ashamed to have it known that they taught colored schools.... The feeling against the colored people was very bitter. The colored people themselves were ignorant of the cause, unless it could be attributed to our condition, not having the means to raise themselves in the scale of wealth and affluence, consequently those who were evil disposed would offer abuse whenever they saw fit, and there was no chance for resentment or redress....

But it was considered such a disgrace for white men to teach colored schools that they would be greatly offended if the colored children bowed or spoke to them on the street. Mr. Anthony, who was at one time teaching the colored school, became very angry because Zebedee Howland met him on the street, spoke to him, raised his hat and bowed. He took no notice of his dark complexioned scholar, but the next Monday morning took poor Zebedee and the whole school to task, saying, "When you meet me on the street, don't look towards me, or speak to me; if you do, I will flog you the first chance I get."....

It was the custom for children on seeing their parish teacher or minister to raise their hats and speak to them, and the girls to make a courtesy. This instruction was taught to them by their parents when small. It was often stated by elderly people that children were to be seen and not heard. When company were in the house they were not to make much noise, and when they came into their own house they must take off their hats and sit down. If they did not know enough to take off their hats they would soon teach them that their heads must be uncovered while in the house. They did not allow their children to be the first at the table; and when called they did not suffer them to help themselves, but to wait until they were helped; when they wanted anything always to ask for it, and when they had finished eating to rise from the table and thank their parents. My parents were so strict that they did not allow us to come to the table until they had finished eating; then they would put victuals on our plates and call us. When we came to the table we had to stand up to eat, not to sit down in chairs. We had to eat just what they put on our plate, and to have our plates cleared before we could have them replenished. When in the street to be respectful to every one, and be very careful not to run against any elderly person. If we did we were liable to feel the weight of their cane; also, to be particular when sent on an errand to a person's



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

house, to knock at the door, and when we enter take off our hats and make a low bow, holding our hats in hand until we went out.

(We can see in the above the reality that lay behind Frederick Douglass's observation that in certain respects people of color in the antebellum northern society had moved from being the slaves of individuals to becoming "slaves of the community.")

1822

 July 18, Thursday: At the [Providence, Rhode Island](#) meetinghouse for black people, Brother Asa C. Goldbury, “a man of colour,” was ordained.

It was a hot summer day but there was business to be attended to on the shore at Lericcio near Leghorn. [Percy Bysshe Shelley](#)’s corpse had been recovered in an advanced state of decomposition and needed to be disposed of in accordance with Italian sanitary regulations. It was not the custom at the time for the widow to attend such an event and [Mary Godwin Wollstonecraft Shelley](#) was elsewhere. [James Henry Leigh Hunt](#) remained in the carriage to keep out of the sun. [George Gordon, Lord Byron](#) took to the coolness of the surf and, eventually, swam out to his boat leaving Trelawny to witness the actual burning, which took place in a metal furnace that hired porters had dragged out onto the beach. When nothing was left in the ashes but jaw, skull, and heart, Trelawny raked out that carbonized lump as a souvenir (eventually he would be persuaded to turn it over to the widow and she would retain it wrapped in silk, in her drawer; in 1889 it would be interred with their son Percy Florence Shelley).⁴



4. Absolutely nothing in the famous 1889 painting of the cremation by [Louis Édouard Fournier](#) is accurate. It had not been a desolate beach. It had not been dusk. The witnesses had not swaddled themselves in heavy coats against the cold. Mary had not knelt in prayer. Hunt and Byron had not struck poses. The corpse, which at that point had neither hands nor a face, was not placed on a pyre of branches.



August 8, Thursday: In a renovation of the [Quaker](#) meetinghouse in [Providence, Rhode Island](#), Friend [Moses Brown](#) reported, “what was called the Negros Gallery” had been removed.



The questions of course arises, why specifically was it that this “Negros Gallery” was constructed in the first place — and why lately had it come to be disused, so that it might at this point be demolished?

The answer, I speculate, is going to be (after adequate research has been done — research which has not yet been begun), that the Quakers had had segregated seating in their meetinghouses, with their servants of color seated away from the white people in such a “Negros Gallery,” but that by the turn of the century these slaves had all been granted manumission documents, and were therefore no longer obligated to accompany their Quaker masters and mistresses to worship. When they made use of the meetinghouse, they made use of it in off hours when the white Quakers were not present, and so of course they no longer went up to the dilapidated “pigeon loft” but sat anywhere they pleased. My speculation would be that with freedom had come a decision to affiliate, not with these Quakers who as white racists were never ever going to accept anyone else as a whole and genuine human being (to my knowledge not one single person of color would ever be accepted as a convinced Friend during this period, despite numerous applications for such consideration), instead along color lines with one another in the African Methodist Episcopal denomination that had been set up in 1816.⁵

[AME](#)

Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) wrote in his journal:

*5th day 8th of 8 M / Our Meeting today was a pretty good one
Two appearances in the Ministry Vizt Father Rodman & Anne*



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

Dennis. –

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

1824

 February 7, Saturday: Die beiden Neffen oder Der Onkel aus Boston, a singspiel by [Felix Mendelssohn](#) to words of Casper, was performed for the initial time, before a small invited audience at the Mendelssohn residence in Berlin.

After arriving home in [Newport, Rhode Island](#), Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) would write in his journal:

Seventh day Morning we took the Stage & rode [from [Providence](#)] to [Bristol](#) ferry, from whence I walked to Uncle Saml Thurstons, D B. having his chaise sent for him from the latter place I rode into Town with him & am Thankful to be at home this evening, having to acknowledge, favour & enlargement since my absence. –

The beginning of the “Hardscrabble” rioting in [Providence, Rhode Island](#) (mobs of white citizens protected by the police while they destroyed the homes of black citizens: urban gentrification through ethnic cleansing). From the diary of George F. Jencks, a white man of Pawtucket, we learn: “A gang of Ruffins toar down & Destroyed the Negro house on the hill this evening.”

Information that is more to the point, about this racism that would culminate in October with a white mob pretending to have been provoked by unwillingness of some black men to step down into the street off the sidewalk to allow them to pass –provoked to the point of tearing apart some 20 black homes in a district off North Main Street known variously as “Addison’s Hollow” and as “Hardscrabble”– may be obtained from the late-life autobiography of [William J. Brown](#), then a 10-year-old observer.⁶

PAGES 50-51: The feeling against the colored people was very
5. Subsequent to my writing the above, my suspicions have been confirmed by reading, in the autobiography of [William J. Brown](#), a grandson of one of the men manumitted by Friend [Moses Brown](#), that:

PAGE 25: Some attended the Congregational church, Rev. James Wilson, pastor; some attended the Methodist church; some attended the Episcopal church, Dr. Crocker, pastor; a few attended the Unitarian church, Rev. Mr. Cady, pastor; and a large number attended the First Baptist church, Dr. Gano, pastor. Some were members of each of the above named churches; the largest number, however, were Baptists, and belonged to the First Baptist Church, but many attended no church at all, because they said they were opposed to going to churches and sitting in pigeon holes, as all the churches at that time had some obscure place for the colored people to sit in.

6. For further details you could consult a publication of the time, HARDCRABBLE CALENDAR: REPORT OF THE TRIALS OF OLIVER CUMMINS, NATHANIEL G. METCALF, GILBERT HINES, AND ARTHUR FARRIER, published in Providence “for the purchaser” during 1824.

WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

Hard Scrabble,

OR MISS PHILISES BOBALITION

O Dear dear what can the de matter be,
Dear, dear what can de matter be,
Pomp gone so long from Phillis away ;
Ha promise to buy me a damask and leghorn,
A Plad and a Crape and Silk Tocking to put on,
And a bunch of fine feather to dress my beaver so gay
O Dear, dear, &c.

O, O, so peaceable late we lib in Hard Scrabble,
'Till routed and driven away by the rabble,
Who 'tack us like furies wid a high diddle diddle !
Demolish our dwelling, smash Bearrau and Cradle,
My Gin Jug and Spider, my Potrait and Ladle,
My Candlestand, Chairs, and poor Pompey's Fiddle.
O Dear, dear, &c.

O! O! such a time I neber before see,
De Mohites come wizz! like a flock of mad bumble bee
Rip open my bed and scatter de fedder !
Assail us wid Brick Bat, wid Crowbars and Shovels,
And drove us poor wretches away from our hovels
To seek shelter out door expose to de wether.
O Dear, dear, &c.

Pomp and I had juss supt on a clam and eel custard,
And just topping off wid desert of tase cheese & mustard
When first salutation widout a forewarning—
Ebery window was smash in, and, O, goody gui !
Pomp leap from de table and cry ' Fly Phillis Fly,'
Or we both shall be mutton'd before morrow morning.
O Dear, dear, &c.

O, de next morning such condition our village,
So late de scene of confusion, riot and pillage.
O! it near broke de heart of my poor aged mother !
De chronics and walls were den totting or falling,
Pöör Cato's hut prop't up, and Cezer's lay sprawling,
And ours' goody gui ! nothing left but de cellar !
O Dear, dear, &c.

De mud Clay & brick dust lay so thick in Hard Scrabble
I was 'blige hold up my skirt to prevent it from drabble
And de fields for a mile was spread wid ben fetter ;
Here lay my new bedtick and dare Pompey's garter
And my platter and Coffee Cup bury'd in Mortar,
In miscurious ruin all lay together.
O Dear, dear, &c.

Pomp has told me of Earthquakes Squall and Tornadoes
Trenarners, Harricanes, Gusts and Valenouse,
Of battle at sea, and battle on shore ;
Of Turks and of Hottentots, Indians and Moors,
Of Rygers and Crocodiles Lions and Bores,
But he neber fire saw such destruction before.
O Dear, dear, &c.

Some few weeks arter some were reign for a trial,
Dare were Peter and Moses and Jim and Abial,
And some forty or tirty or twenty or so ;
But de damage 'twas judge was by some shock of nature,
Mr. Nobody did it ! O what a wile creature,
So de court find um No Guilty and tell um to go.
O dear what a Rogue Mr. Nobody.

Mr. Nobody, wretch ! some invisible d-r-l
De biggest brick block in a moment he level
See what he did bout tre months ago :
He demolish a bilding near four stories high,
And level the whole in a twink of an eye,
Pray who did it ! Why Nobody know.
O dear, dear, &c.

I guess it best now for us brack folks be easy,
And no longer live lives immoral and lazy,
But gain honest living by sweat ob our brow ;
Depend on't de white folk won't den trouble or 'tack us,
But de good people of Providence will always respec us,
As they are wont to respec all good people now.
O dear, dear, &c.

So Miss Boston keep home your lazy black rabble,
Nor compel them seek shelter again at Hard Scrabble,
For every maggot should stick to be core ;
For should they visit us gain they may find it foul wether
We've plenty of 'Tar and de ground cover'd wid Fether
And we've Pitch to pitch you all out of door.
O dear, dear, &c.

So while Pomp earn a little by honest day labour,
I'll wash and unke soap for some of my neighbour,
And lib by industry as honest folks do :
Pomp throw by your Fiddle & I'll smash de Gin Bottle
And soon we'll be able to build up our hovel
And more steady course we both will pursue.
O dear, dear, and so fort.

Sold Wholesale and Retail at No. 152, Ann Street—Boston.



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bitter. The colored people themselves were ignorant of the cause, unless it could be attributed to our condition, not having the means to raise themselves in the scale of wealth and affluence, consequently those who were evil disposed would offer abuse whenever they saw fit, and there was no chance for resentment or redress. Mobs were also the order of the day, and the poor colored people were the sufferers.

In the northwest part of the city was a place called Addison Hollow, but was nicknamed Hardscrabble. A great many colored people purchased land there, because it was some distance from town, and hence quite cheap. They put up small houses for themselves, and earned their living in various ways. They could be seen almost any time, with their saw-horse, standing, some on the Great Bridge, some on Shingle Bridge, and some on Mill Bridge, waiting for work. As hard coal was not known at that time (except Liverpool coal,) everybody used wood. Some men did jobs of gardening and farming.

A man named Addison built houses, and rented to any one who would give him his price. As he rented cheap, people of bad character hired of him, and these drew a class of bad men and women, so that the good were continually being molested, having no protection. At last disturbances became so common that they raised a mob, and drove many from their houses, then tore them down, took their furniture -what little they had- carried it to Pawtucket, and sold it at auction. This was done late in the fall. One colored man named Christopher Hall, a widower with three or four children, a pious man, bearing a good character, and supported himself and family by sawing wood, had his house torn down by the rougns and stripped of its contents. He drew the roof over the cellar, and lived in it all winter. The people tried in vain to coax him out, and offered him a house to live in. Many went to see the ruins, among them some white ladies, who offered to take his children and bring them up, but he would not let them go. In the spring following he went to Liberia, on the western coast of Africa. Not long after this there was another mob, commenced at the west end of Olney Street. Here were a number of houses built and owned by white men, and rented to any one, white or colored, who wanted to hire one or more rooms, rent payable weekly. Some of these places had bar-rooms, where liquors were dealt out, and places where they sold cakes, pies, doughnuts, etc. These they called cooky stands. In some houses dancing and fiddling was the order of the day. It soon became dangerous for one to pass through there in the day time that did not belong to their gang, or patronize them. Most all sailors who came into port would be introduced into Olney Street by some one who had an interest that way. I remember when a boy, passing up one day to my father's garden, which was on that street, in company with two other boys, looking at the people as we passed along. Some were sitting at the windows, some in their doorway, some singing, some laughing, some gossiping, some had their clay furnaces in front of their houses, cooking, and seeing us looking at them, said "What are you gawking at, you



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brats?" hurling a large stone at the same time, and we were obliged to run for our lives. This street had a correspondence with all the sailor boarding houses in town, and was sustained by their patronage. Vessels of every description were constantly entering our port, and sailing crafts were seen from the south side of the Great Bridge to India Point. It was the great shipping port of New England in those days, and although the smallest of all the States, Rhode Island was regarded as among the wealthiest, the Quakers occupying a large portion of the State.

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

 October 19, Tuesday: From the diary of George F. Jencks, a white man of Pawtucket: "Last night the Whites assembled on the bridge in Providence and went out in a body to that part of town occupied by the blacks and pulled down Ten of their houses and laid waste all there contents and this day the Governor and Council has ordered out the Light Infantry to guard the town."⁷ A crowd of perhaps as many as a thousand white people had stood around idly and watched in [Providence, Rhode Island](#) as a white mob, reacting to perceived economic competition from free black Americans, had demolished some 20 black homes in "Addison's Hollow" or "Hardscrabble," a challenged neighborhood along Olney Lane by what is now Gaspee street and the State House. (It would all happen again, in the Olney Lane and Snowtown district of Providence, Charles/Orms Street area, on September 21, 1831.) 

RACISM

Although 10 of these white rioters would be prosecuted for serious offenses, their defense, provided by the prominent local attorney Joseph Tillinghast, consisting of an argument that actually they had been improving "the morals of the community" by removing a "pig-stye" of lewdness, disorder, [drunkenness](#), and unseemly dancing, would prove to be entirely successful. The only convictions would be on minor charges, and the only punishment would be of the "slap on the wrist" variety, with leading white citizens openly congratulating them for their civic-minded destructiveness. (When the rioting would break out again in 1831, however, it would end with the militia needing to kill four white men, and afterward, in the interest of maintaining public order, voters would approve a charter for a city government with stronger police powers.)

Providence in the 1820s was a fast-growing port town, drawing on its hinterland's farms and manufactures to overshadow [Newport](#), once Rhode Island's primary metropolis. Providence had about 11,750 people in 1820 (by 1825 there would be about 15,000, and by 1830 about 17,000). Of these, about 1,000 were freemen who met the property qualification to vote in Town Meetings. At the other extreme of Providence's social spectrum were about 1,000 blacks, rising from 980 in 1820 to 1,200-1,400 in 1830. Only four people were still enslaved. Many black families had lived in Providence for generations, but others were recent arrivals from South County. About half the blacks in town lived with their employers, and the other half were generally drawn of course to neighborhoods where land and rent were cheap, at the north end of town. A proud few owned homes. Two days before the "Hardscrabble" riots, the Providence Beacon had editorialized about "Our Black Population." (The Beacon, published almost single-handedly by William Spear, would be characterized as "a fearless paper" by a lawyer representing the white rioters, Chief Justice William Staples, in his Annals of Providence, but Attorney General Duttee Pearce would characterize William Spear himself as "a person of evil, wicked, and malicious mind and disposition." Spear was the sort of person who would lament in print that local blacks were "naturally vicious and wicked," "profligate," and "worthless," and spread stories that groups of blacks were forcing whites to step off the sidewalks to make way for them rather than themselves

7. See HISTORY OF THE PROVIDENCE RIOTS, published in Providence by M.M. Brown during 1831.



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stepping off the sidewalks to make way for whites as was natural and proper.) The previous weekend the Providence Beacon had reported that local blacks had defeated a white crowd for possession of the bridge on Smith Street (were people using this bridge to cope with the heat of the season?)—since nature had given them disproportionate “physical strength”—and that a thrown stone had wounded “a respectable lady” on the breast. Spear was warning that Providence after dark was now “absolutely dangerous for females.”

Other Providence newspapers, such as the Jeffersonian Providence Patriot, the proto-Whig Manufacturer’s and Farmer’s Journal, and the old Federalist Providence Gazette, generally ignored the white riot. The Patriot ran a half-inch notice of the “affray,” and after a few days reprinted the Gazette’s editorial obliquely deploring “the increase of our colored population.” It noted that the Town Council had ordered a census of blacks for the purpose of expelling the “idle, dissolute” ones. After reviling the capacities of the race, it allowed that most long-settled blacks were “sober, industrious and respectable citizens.”

Spear’s Beacon, however, was offering that while “extermination” was not indicated, at least as yet, some decent white people would need to volunteer to “rid the town of its superabundant share” of transient poor blacks. It was two days later, on the evening of October 18th, that a white mob marched north to Hardscrabble and destroyed eleven structures. Most of the structures destroyed were speakeasies, but all accounts agree that a few were the homes of “respectable” black craftsmen and their families. By some accounts, including the Beacon’s, this mob comprised 400 to 500 rioters and up to 1,000 eager spectators, although others estimated the mob at only 50 or 60 effectives, with a cheering section amounting to only about a hundred.

The next Beacon published a short account of the violence, followed by a romantic lamentation for the poor, innocent, hard-working black victims, after which Spear chastised their impudence, “idleness and vice” and proposed that Draconian controls be imposed over them. This article, entitled “RIOT AND REBELLION,” announced that Providence, known “for the purity of its morals and its domestic felicity and repose,” had been “disharmonized” by the indiscriminate “atrocities” of an “abandoned and profligate mob.”

Hardscrabble, wrote Spear, was a “hamlet” of “smiling aspect” where blacks had moved “to avoid all intercourse” with “hostile” whites. When attacked, the “unoffending and unsuspecting inhabitants” “were engaged in convivial sports and rural games.” Their “innocent festivity” may have involved rum, for the newspaper mentioned that some provident housekeepers had enough of it on hand to buy off the mob and thus preserve their homes. In the wake of the white mob, Spear found devoted mothers, an “honest sailor” and “an aged son of Africa,” mourning “with downcast countenance” their “humble cottages,” the fruits of “honest toil,” and gasping, “Hope forsaken!”

Spear predicted that these wronged blacks would be righteously seeking vengeance. They were innocent as lambs, except that they were “impudent, and often offer insults to whites.” Blacks “cannot bear the luxuries of freedom,” and are temperamentally incompatible with whites. Therefore, “let their liberties be abridged.” we should put “every Negro under the immediate control of the Orphan’s Court,” and apprentice them all to “respectable Mechanics.” Some would be “susceptible of improvement,” and for others “it would be the means of driving them from our region.” This “benevolence” would benefit both whites and blacks — the only alternative would be a cycle of riot culminating in a white “war of extermination” destroying this black element in the town.

The next week, Spear’s sympathies would be even more firmly with the wronged black residents of Providence. He would be pointing out that many of the local blacks, although they had become “miserable wretches,” were actually the offspring of “noble” Revolutionary veterans.



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1825



In this year the brig *Venus*, owned by the firm of Brown & Ives of [Providence, Rhode Island](#), was making regular runs along Long Island Sound. We know of a Captain John T. Childs of [Warren](#), Rhode Island who was engaged in such business. Therefore it is a reasonable hypothesis, that this would be the “sloop” skippered by “Captain Childs” written about in late life by [William J. Brown](#) as on a voyage conveying cargo and passengers up Long Island Sound from New-York to [Providence](#), Rhode Island, aboard which he had enlisted at the age of approximately eleven, which had gotten caught in a storm and apparently came close to sinking:

I went coasting on board of the sloop *Venus*, commanded by Captain Childs, in whose family I had lived some years previous. He offered me ten dollars a month to go before the mast. I accepted the position and went to work. We numbered six in all: the captain, mate, cook, steward, and two foremastmen. His sloop was the largest in the line but the dullest sailer, unless she was under a stiff breeze. We came out of New York one day heavily laden with cotton, and one hundred carboys of vitriol on deck, bound for Providence, intending to stop at [Bristol](#) to land freight; there were thirty-three passengers on board. We started with a light wind which increased during the night, and became so powerful by ten in the morning, that it carried away our topsail, which we afterwards secured. The sea ran so high, and we shipped such heavy seas, that we lost the blocking from two casks, catching uncle Tom, the cook, between them. I did not see the danger he was in until the captain coming out called all hands to rescue him from the danger he was in; we did so, John and myself blocking and securing the casks. I was securing the main boom when the ship came about; she shipped another sea and down went the forecaskle and half a dozen casks of water. We were sent down to bail out the water; uncle Jack dipped it up, and I passed it over to John, and he threw it overboard. We had not been long at work when she shipped a second sea, and sent down more water; it seemed to be about a foot deep. Uncle Jack said “Hold on Bill, it is no use bailing, we must go up and shorten sail”; saying this he left me at the foot of the steps, went on deck, and said to the captain, “Hadn’t we better shorten sail?” He said, “No, we will drive her through;” to which uncle Jack replied, “Well drive her through if we go to the bottom.” I kept at my post at the foot of the steps, waiting for uncle Jack’s return, when she shipped another sea, filling the scuttle. I felt for the steps, for I thought she was sinking; soon I heard the captain’s voice. I jumped around trying to get up the steps, when the hatch came down over me. It was dark, and the water was nearly up to my arms. I was getting out of the water, but reaching the hatchway, could go no farther. I put the top of my head against the hatch, but could not move it; all was still on deck; not a step or a voice was heard. I was determined to come out, and stooping down, raised myself with all the power possible against the hatch; Captain Childs was sitting on the



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top of it to keep it down; a sea struck him in the back at the same time I was butting the hatch and knocked him completely off; he would have gone overboard, carried by the force of the wind, had he not fetched up the shrouds. When I came on deck a sad spectacle presented itself; her gunwales were even with the water, the men were trying to move around on deck and the water was up to their middle. Uncle Jack let go the jib and flying jib halyards, settled the peak, throttled the mainsails, lowered the sternsails, and she came up. It seemed by appearances that in one minute more she would have sunk, never to rise again. I took a hand-spike and knocked a board off the railing, letting the water off, and relieving the deck. I went aft to the pump, rigged it and went to pumping. The clattering of the pumps aroused the captain, and he said, "that's right, Bill, pump away." I kept watching the mate, thinking that if he got the boat which was hanging on the davits, I would grasp an oar and follow him. I asked a man who came on to work his passage to spell me at the pumps; he said he couldn't pump. There was a minister in board standing by, who said to him, "What kind of a man are you; here this boy is doing all he can to save the ship, which seems to be in danger of going to the bottom, and you refuse to help him." When the minister said that, I was frightened, for I was not fit to die, and if the vessel sunk, I saw no possible way of escaping hell. I began to pray within myself, for I never intended to go to hell, but I knew I must go there unless I repented; still I had confidence to believe that I must read the bible, and go according to its directing to be saved. I never thought of being taken by surprise before. I now felt that something must be done, and I promised if the Lord would spare my life, I would seek him in earnest and not suffer myself to be caught in such a state again. We soon got through the race and came to anchor; as I came out of the forecandle a sea struck me, and knocked my hat off; my shoes were in the chain box, and my jacket lay in the berth. Uncle Jack asked me to take something to drink, as I was wet and cold; I told him I would; he handed it to me and I took a tumbler full of rum, and drank it, not knowing its power. I took two biscuits and got into my berth, and knew no more until ten o'clock the next morning. The sloop got under way, and they called for me, but I was nowhere to be found; they found my hat and shoes and came to the conclusion that I was washed overboard; no one could recollect when I was last seen; they knew I was pumping, and that was the last they knew about me. The sloop arrived in [Newport](#) at twelve o'clock that night. He entered his vessel in the morning and reported the rough time he had on the sound and the loss of one man; after breakfast they began discharging their freight, Uncle Jack had to work in the hold as they were one man short. I was awoke by hearing the words "back down your tackle, hoist away." I could not imagine where I was. I lay some time thinking that we must be in Newport, for we had to stop there to leave freight. I got up, ate my breakfast, and went on deck; they had hoisted a barrel of flour up, and were just landing it, when I put my hand on John's



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shoulder; turning around he saw me, and jumped from me with a shriek; the man below asked, "What's the matter?" John said, "Here is Bill." They came out of the hold, to see if it was me. The captain hearing the sound came quickly into the sloop. They were all anxious to know where I had been. I told them I had struck my head against the hatchway, trying to get out of the scuttle, then got into my berth and knew no more until morning. They were all very glad that I was safe; saying, they thought they had looked everywhere, but never once thought about my berth. When we arrived in Providence, and discharged our cargo, we found our sheet iron damaged. We had five hundred bundles in the bottom of the sloop. I felt as if I had been a sailor long enough, and now desired to turn my attention to business of a different kind; so I left the vessel and entered school again.

1829



January 31, Saturday: LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF ROBERT, THE HERMIT OF MASSACHUSETTS, WHO HAS LIVED 14 YEARS IN A CAVE, SECLUDED FROM HUMAN SOCIETY. COMPRISING, AN ACCOUNT OF HIS BIRTH, PARENTAGE, SUFFERINGS, AND PROVIDENTIAL ESCAPE FROM UNJUST AND CRUEL BONDAGE IN EARLY LIFE — AND HIS REASONS FOR BECOMING A RECLUSE. TAKEN FROM HIS OWN MOUTH, AND PUBLISHED FOR HIS BENEFIT. ([Providence](#), [Rhode Island](#): Printed for H. TRUMBELL — 1829; Price 12 1-2 Cents⁸)

HERMITS

From the [Concord Yeoman's Gazette](#):

CONCORD LYCEUM. — The first Lecture before this society was given in the Court House on Wednesday Evening last, by Rev. BERNARD WHITMAN, of Waltham. The subject was "POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS," and was treated in a very instructive and interesting manner. The meeting was well attended; we should think full three hundred hearers were present, some of whom came from adjoining towns. The President announced, that a second Lecture would be given, by Dr. HORATIO ADAMS, on Wednesday evening next, at the same place.

8. We have in Providence two life-story books which were published in order to create an income for a needy elderly man of color. One is this 1829 publication done for the benefit of [Robert Voorhis](#), and the other is an 1883 publication by and for [William J. Brown](#). Did this one at least in part inspire that one?



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1830

 Steamboats out of New-York began to bypass the port at New London, Connecticut and deliver their passengers to the docks of [Providence, Rhode Island](#), where the passengers could take either the stage along the Lower Path to Boston, or the barge up the [canal](#) to Worcester. From this year until 1835 the *Lady Carrington*, an elegant and carefully designed barge, would be floating passengers along in comfort on a 12-hour cruise from Providence to Worcester (steamers plying the sound had by this point quite stripped the Connecticut coast of its timber).

The 1st steamboats on the Danube River in Europe.

A total of \$1,066,922 in tolls was collected on New York's canals.

Subsequent to this year, celebrations of Black Election Day in [Rhode Island](#) would fall off, no longer occurring during the planting season of each and every year.

It may have been at approximately this point that [Providence](#) citizen [William J. Brown](#) was giving over his dreams of self-improvement through travel in order to get married and raise a family:

PAGES 152-155: I have previously remarked that the colored people have but very little chance to elevate themselves to a position of influence and wealth, and I determined to travel until I could find a brighter prospect for the future than Providence. I found, however, that there was a very formidable hindrance blocking up my pathway. I had made the acquaintance of a young lady schoolmate while attending school. This acquaintance was not formed for any special purpose, but simply to have some one to spend my leisure hours with. I made it a practice to call twice a week, as I was remarkably fond of being in the society of ladies. The reason I did not want to make a wife of her then was, because I was not able to support her, having no permanent business that would warrant me a living, and thought it better for one to be miserable than two.

I had been waiting upon her some two years, and thought I would break off the easiest way I could. I commenced by making short visits when I called, saying I could not stay long, as I had some engagement that called me away, at the same time watching to see the effect it would produce. I found it created a worriment of mind, making her very inquisitive. The next step was to omit a visit at the regular time. This brought forth questions I could not answer satisfactorily without telling a falsehood; finally I knew not what to do, for my visits had aroused a passion in my heart and mind I could not smother. I was also satisfied that if I wished to make a companion of her for life I could find no one with more attractions in personal appearances, qualifications or ability, than she possessed in my weak judgement.

The question was, however, soon decided with me, for the time



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was fast approaching when I must settle on the subject of my departure. I was taken suddenly ill, suffering much from pain, which I could not account for. I had eaten nothing to cause it. It continued increasing until I was compelled to shut up my shop and go home. This was before my mother's death, and she was an excellent nurse.... I had repeated attacks, each one becoming more severe, until I was compelled to give up the idea of going away.... I had said nothing to my intended or any one else about going away, but had merely said that if people could not prosper in one place they had better move to another....

Now the question to be settled was, would she accept me for a husband. I could not boast of any beauty and was near-sighted. Uniting in wedlock was no small thing to consider; its conditions extended through life. In making up her mind these defects might make her change her opinion of me. She might think it for her interest to marry a man blessed with good eyesight; if anything happened after marriage it would be something out of her power to obviate. I prized my good education highly, for it was in my favor; it excelled that of my associates at this time and if anything, present or future, could be accomplished by it, the means were in my possession. I also prized the good character I bore, for I was held in esteem by the elderly people for industry and politeness. The young people had a good opinion of me, because I was well spoken of by the aged; having knowledge of the estimate placed upon my character, I thought my defects would not be noticed.

I now felt that the time had come for me to settle this question, for it had long been a source of trouble to me. I had made her frequent visits and enjoyed myself much in her society. Now I desired to know something of her personal appearance during the day, when engaged in her domestic affairs. To accomplish this I would drop something during the evening, which would cause me to call after during the next day. I would go at different hours for the things. It was common for ladies to be prepared for company during the evening; then one could find no fault with their appearance; but to my satisfaction I always found her in trim, dressed according to her work. I considered her every way qualified, so far as domestic affairs were concerned, to make a suitable companion for any one, whether in high or low degree, and every one spoke well of her character. Her temper was mild, and there was but few who could equal her in looks, besides she enjoyed the best of health, having a carriage and appearance well calculated to sustain it. Thus having the matter settled in my own mind, I found no just cause to prevent us from getting married. I went and brought matters to a close respecting our union in just three months from that day.

The varied incidents which had been thrown in my way had made its impression upon my mind, and my views in regard to the future were entirely changed. Instead of making preparations to go out and see the world, I decided to settle down at home; my business was good and increasing every day, everything seemed to warrant my success in supporting a family if I had one.



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1831



September 21, Wednesday: Alexis de Tocqueville had an interview with Mr. Gray, a Senator of the State of Massachusetts, and confided to his diary as to the reasons for the relative moral purity of the American people:

American morals are, I believe, the purest existing in any nation, which may be attributed, it seems to me, to five principal causes:

1. *Their physical constitution. They belong to a northern race, even though almost all living in a climate warmer than that of England.*

2. *Religion still possesses there a great power over the souls. They have even in part retained the traditions of the most severe religious sects.*

3. *They are entirely absorbed in the business of making money. There are no idle among them. They have the steady habits of those who are always working.*

4. *There is no trace of the prejudices of birth which reign in Europe, and it is so easy to make money that poverty is never an obstacle to marriage. Thence it results that the individuals of two sexes unite ..., only do so from mutual attraction, and find themselves tied at a time in life when the man is almost always more alive to the pleasures of the heart than those of the senses. It is rare that a man is not married at 2-+ years.*

5. *In general the women receive an education that is rational (even a bit raisonneuse.) The factors above enumerated make it possible without great inconvenience to allow them an extreme liberty; the passage from the state of young girl to that of a married woman has no dangers for her.*

...

Mr Clay, who appears to have occupied himself with statistical researches on this point, told Gustave de Beaumont that at Boston the prostitutes numbered about 2000 (I have great difficulty believing this.) They are recruited among country girls who, after having been seduced, are obliged to flee their district and family, and find themselves without resource. It seems that the young blood of the city frequents them, but the fact is concealed with extreme care, and the evil stops there, without ever crossing the domestic threshold or troubling the families. A man who should not be convicted but suspected of having an intrigue would immediately be excluded from society. All doors would be shut to him.

Mr. Dewight was saying to me that a venereal disease was a mark of infamy which was very hard to wash away. On the other hand, the police do not concern themselves in any way with the prostitutes. The Americans say that it would be to legitimate the evil to oppose to it such a remedy. Mr. Dewight said to us



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(what we had already had occasion to remark in the prison reports) that of all the prisoners those who most rarely reformed were the women of bad morals.

Norborne E. Sutton wrote to Governor John Floyd of Virginia:



Bowling Green Sept 21st 1831

Honorable John Floyd

Sir It is now certain that the slaves in this county was apprised of the insurrection which developed itself in South Hampton. Some Gentleman have enquired of these slaves as to this fact, (Mr. Campbels) in this immediate neighbourhood all admitted that they had received information of the intended insurrection but that it commenced two soon by eight days Yesterday a faithfull servant of Mr. Wm P Taylors gave him information that large meetings of slave were held in his neighbourhood for the purpose of concerting and effecting the best cours they should pursue to get clere of the whits Much excitment and much alarm has prevailed in the couty especally with the slaves of the county and it is now so obvious that the slaves design an attempt between this and the 1st of October I have concluded to suggest to you the proprity of furnishg the malitia with arms at least to some extent For one until the information in relation to Mr Taylors slaves was received I had not even had my gun in my room Because I did not apprehend any danger and I was certain it was calculatd to create a greater degree of alarm with my wife and I thought two it was giving an importance which might induce the negros in this neighborhood to immagine that I was alarmd I hope sir you will arm the Troop and a part of the companies in this county if not all I am as perfectly satisfied that those travling preachers and Pedlers have been instrumental to a great degree in producing the present state of things as that I am now addressng this letter to you And I do hope that the Legislature will at the next session at least pass a law which shall have for its object This That no man particularly a strangr shall preach in any County or Town untill he shall have produced sufficnt evidence that he has been regularly ordained and of his moral worth and standing when he was received on his last place of residence I hope I shall be excused for suggestg other civils slaves should not be permitted to have preachng at any time nor should they be permitted to go about contracting for themselves I would make the Law in relation in relation to These matters more penal and I would make it the duty of every officer to arrest such slaves as are permitted to goe at large and sell him forthwith the result to be applied to the use of the County Again Sir it is now the practice at every Court House to see large numbrs of Carts some white and some black vending and trad in various things there Sir although I have used my exertions to arrest the civil practice of court nights frequently the exhibition of whites and blacks mingling together Beggars description They have no law imposed upon them They are composed of the very dregs of the different Counties and what I ask is



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*to be expected but disorder and consequences of the most dangerous and alarming results Last October or November Mr Blak had a valuable slave killd at these Carts white and black all engaged in the [encounter?] late at night I hope you will incur[?] these suggestions repectivly yours &c
Norborne E Sutton*

*P.S. I would suggest the propriety of arming the four companys immediably about this place wher information must be receve first on sight to be fully armed say Capt John Bellah Capt John Washington Captain Washington Carter and Capt W. Wrights these I think should be armed fully
N. E Sutton*

In [Rhode Island](#), as incendiary reports of a supposed massive slave revolt in [North Carolina](#) were appearing in the [Providence Journal](#) (slaves were maybe burning down the city of Wilmington; a white army was maybe gathering in Raleigh, etc.), there was another local race riot. In the white riot of 1824, the rioters had torn down several houses in the black district of Providence by Gaspee Street and the State House that was known as Hardscrabble. Again this was happening, fueled by [liquor](#) and property values, this time in Olneys Lane (now Olney Street) and in Snowtown, a hollow up against Smith Hill southwest of the Hardscrabble district, in the Charles/Orms Street area. The rioting was initiated by a mob of white sailors, continued with the throwing of stones between a group of blacks and a group of whites, and culminated with a black man stepping out of a house with a gun and warning the sailors away –“Is this the way the blacks are to live, to be obliged to defend themselves from stones?”– and then being forced to shoot dead one of the advancing white men. The mob, except for five sailors, retreated to the foot of the hill. After someone shot and wounded three of these sailors, the mob again advanced, and began systematically to knock down two houses and damage several others.

So, as a point of interest, here is the manner in which these events would be truncated in an almanac of 1844:

1831. A riot of four days continuance commenced Sept. 21, in Olney's lane, North end. It originated with some sailors and the colored people living in the lane, one of the former being shot by a black man, and instantly killed. An immediate attack was made on the houses, and two were promptly destroyed. Each evening the mob increased in number, and violence. The efforts of the Town Council and the Sheriff to suppress it were ineffectual, and the services of the military were called into requisition by the Governor. On the fourth evening, the corps, near Shingle Bridge, were assailed by the crowd, with stones and other missiles, and were commanded to fire, which they did, and four men fell mortally wounded. The crowd dispersed, and quiet was restored. Nearly twenty small houses had been destroyed or badly injured. – At a town meeting, Nov. 22, more than three-fifths of the votes polled were in favor of a City Charter.

We can afford to let local citizen [William J. Brown](#) tell the story, for his account is remarkably detailed despite the fact that we have no reason to suspect that he himself had been present and remarkably tolerant despite the fact that he himself had no reason whatever to be objective about this tense racial confrontation:

PAGES 50-54: The feeling against the colored people was very



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bitter. The colored people themselves were ignorant of the cause, unless it could be attributed to our condition, not having the means to raise themselves in the scale of wealth and affluence, consequently those who were evil disposed would offer abuse whenever they saw fit, and there was no chance for resentment or redress. Mobs were also the order of the day, and the poor colored people were the sufferers....

Not long after this [an earlier gentrification mob action] there was another mob, commenced at the west end of Olney Street. Here were a number of houses built and owned by white men, and rented to any one, white or colored, who wanted to hire one or more rooms, rent payable weekly. Some of these places had bar-rooms, where liquors were dealt out, and places where they sold cakes, pies, doughnuts, etc. These they called cooky stands. In some houses dancing and fiddling was the order of the day. It soon became dangerous for one to pass through there in the day time that did not belong to their gang, or patronize them. Most all sailors who came into port would be introduced into Olney Street by some one who had an interest that way. I remember when a boy, passing up one day to my father's garden, which was on that street, in company with two other boys, looking at the people as we passed along. Some were sitting at the windows, some in their doorway, some singing, some laughing, some gossiping, some had their clay furnaces in front of their houses, cooking, and seeing us looking at them, said "What are you gawking at, you brats?" hurling a large stone at the same time, and we were obliged to run for our lives. This street had a correspondence with all the sailor boarding houses in town, and was sustained by their patronage. Vessels of every description were constantly entering our port, and sailing crafts were seen from the south side of the Great Bridge to India Point. It was the great shipping port of New England in those days, and although the smallest of all the States, Rhode Island was regarded as among the wealthiest, the Quakers occupying a large portion of the State....

There was a sailor boarding house in Power Street, kept by a man from Virginia by the name of Jimmie Axum. He was a sailor, every inch of him, and his wife, Hannah, was an Indian woman of the Narragansett tribe. Uncle Jimmie was a shipping master and a fiddler, and when he failed to entertain sailors, they all knew where to go – Olney Street was their next port of entry.

When a ship's crew of sailors came ashore they would all go to Uncle Jimmie's to board, and Uncle Jimmie, with his household, would entertain them with fiddle and tamborine. There would be drinking and dancing through the day and evening, and every half hour some one would take a pitcher and go after liquor, which they purchased by the quart or pint. The best of Jamaica rum then sold for nine pence a quart; gin at the same price. Brandy was twenty-five cents a quart.

In those days it was common to drink liquor; everybody used it. Ministers drank and Christians drank. If you were passing on Main or Water Street in the morning the common salutation was:



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"Good morning, Mr. A. or B., won't you walk in and take a glass of brandy or gin?" If men were at work on the wharf, at eleven in the morning and four in the afternoon grog was passed around, consisting of a jug of rum and a pail of water. Each one would help himself to as much as he wanted. Even the people that went out washing must be treated at eleven and four o'clock, and people were considered mean who would not furnish these supplies to those whom they employed. If a person went out to make a call or spend the evening and was not treated to something to drink, they would feel insulted. You might as well tell a man in plain words not to come again, for he surely would go off and spread it, how mean they were treated – not even so much as to ask them to have something to drink; and you would not again be troubled with their company.

The sailors often drank to excess. You could frequently see them on South Water Street lying at full length or seated against a building intoxicated.

After sailors had stayed at Uncle Jimmie's boarding-house long enough to be stripped of nearly all their money by Uncle Jimmie and his wife, and the females which hung around there, they would be suffered to stroll up to Olney Street to spend the rest of their money.

One night a number of sailors boarding at Uncle Jimmie's went up to Olney Street to attend a dance. It was about nine o'clock when they left the house, expecting to dance all night and have what they called a sailor's reel and breakdown. About ten o'clock there came to Uncle Jim's a large, tall and powerful looking black man to the door. He said, "Uncle Jimmie, where is the boys?" He answered, "You will find them up in Olney Street; they went up to a dance tonight." He replied, "I am going up there, and if anybody comes here and inquires for me tell them I am gone up to the dance in Olney Street." Uncle Jimmy said, "Who are you and what is your name?" The man replied, "I am the Rattler." No one took notice of him. Those that were on the floor continued their dancing. This man seeing no one noticed him went in amongst them and commenced dancing, running against one man and pushing against another, just as his fancy led him. There being at that time five or six large men calling themselves fighting men or bullies, came to the conclusion that they would not have their dance broke up in that shape by a stranger that nobody knew. One of the men by the name of James Treadwell, and known to be a great fighter, said to another large double-jointed man, so considered, by the name of Augustus Williams, "This fellow calls himself the Rattler, let's rattle his box." So they gathered three or four other men who would come to their assistance if needed. They approached the stranger and addressed him saying, "Who are you, stranger, and what do you want here?" He replied "I am the Rattler." They said to him, "If you don't clear out we will rattle your box." He replied, "That you can do as soon as you have a mind to." Without further ceremony they all pitched into him. The Rattler threw one man into the bar, another he threw across the room, some he slammed against the



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sides of the house, and in a few minutes he cleared the house, and as they had no power to resist him, they very wisely concluded that he was the devil in fine clothing. This story was told me by Augustus Williams, who was present and witnessed the whole affair and declared it to be the truth. The next visitation in Olney Street was made by two crews of sailors, one white and the other colored, consequently a fight was the order of the day, in which the blacks were the conquerors, and drove the whites out of the street. The white sailors not relishing this kind of treatment, doubled their forces the next night and paid Olney Street another visit, and had a general time of knocking down and dragging out. This mob conduct lasted for nearly a week. They greatly discomfited the saloonkeepers, drinking their liquors, smashing up the decanters and other furniture. One of their number was shot dead by a bar tender, which so enraged them that they began to tear down houses, threatening to destroy every house occupied by colored people. Their destructive work extended through Olney Street, Gaspee Street and a place called the Hollow, neither of which bore a very good reputation. They warned the better class of colored people to move out, and then went on with their work of destruction, calling on men of like principles, from other towns, to help, promising to share with them in the plunder, or take their pay from the banks. Governor Arnold hearing of this ordered out the military, thinking that their presence would quell the mob. They were not so easily frightened, and continued their work of ruin until the governor was compelled to order his men to fire. This had the desired effect; broke up the riot and dispersed the mob; but Olney Street had fallen to rise no more as a place of resort for rum shops, sailors and lewd women.

READ EDWARD FIELD TEXT

Here now is the same event, but as it would be described in William Read Staples's 1843 ANNALS OF THE TOWN OF PROVIDENCE FROM ITS FIRST SETTLEMENT, TO THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CITY GOVERNMENT, IN JUNE, 1832:

The first outbreak of popular feeling was on the night of September 21. A number of sailors visited Olney's lane for the purpose of having a row with the blacks inhabiting there. After making a great noise there and throwing stones, a gun was fired from one of the houses. The greater part of the persons in the lane then retreated to the west end of it, and five sailors who had not been engaged in any of the previous transactions, went up the lane. A black man on the steps of his house, presented a gun, and told them to keep their distance. They in turn proposed taking his gun. This they did not attempt, but pursuing their walk a little further, then stopped. Here they were ordered by the black man "to clear out," or he would fire at them. This they dared him to do. He did fire, and one of their number was instantly killed. The first company, who were still at the foot of the lane, then returned, tore down two houses and broke the windows of the rest. During the next day there was a great



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excitement. The sheriff of the county with other peace officers were in Olney's lane early in the evening. As the mob increased in numbers and in violence of language, they were ordered to disperse, and seven taken in custody. Subsequently others were arrested, who were rescued from the officers. The sheriff then required military aid of the Governor of the state, and at midnight the First Light Infantry marched to his assistance. The mob, not intimidated by their presence, assaulted them with stones. Finding that they could effect nothing without firing upon them, the soldiers left the lane, followed by the mob, who then returned to their work, and demolished six more houses in the lane and one near Smith street, not separating until between three and four o'clock in the morning. On the morning of the 23d, an attack on the jail being expected, the sheriff required military aid, and the Governor issued his orders to the Light Dragoons, the Artillery, the Cadets, the Volunteers, and the First Infantry, to be in arms at six o'clock in the evening. The mob appeared only in small force, and did little mischief. The military were dismissed until the next evening. On the evening of the 24th there was a great collection of persons in Smith street and its vicinity. Soon they commenced pulling down houses. Upon this, finding it impossible to disperse or stay them, the sheriff called again on the Governor, and the military were again assembled. During their march to Smith street they were assailed with stones. They marched up Smith street and took post on the hill. Here both the Governor and the sheriff remonstrated with the mob, and endeavored to induce them to separate, informing them that the muskets of the military were loaded with ball cartridges. This being ineffectual, the riot act was read, and they were required by a peace officer to disperse. The mob continued to throw stones both at the houses and soldiers. The sheriff then attempted to disperse them by marching the dragoons and infantry among them, but without success. He then ordered the military to fire, and four persons fell mortally wounded, in Smith street, just east of Smith's bridge. The mob immediately dispersed, and peace was restored.



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This week, Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) and his wife had been visiting [Newport](#) from their current home at the [Quaker](#) educational institution that eventually would become the “[Moses Brown School](#)” in [Providence, Rhode Island](#).



6th day [Friday] 16th of 9 M 1831 / Having for sometime anticipated a visit to Newport We went on board the Steam Boat at 12 OC & arrived at our home about 3 OC PM. – I had not been there half an hour before I met with an accident which so lamed me that I was wholly unable to get about & 7th [Saturday] & 1st day [Sunday]s I was in Bed most of the time – on 2nd day [Monday] I was about a little & on 3rd day [Tuesday] we came home again to the Institution not a little disappointed in not being able to visit my friends & attend to many little things that was desirable to me. – But disappointment & trial is the lot of us all on this side of the grave, & I have much to be thankful for, in being favourd as I have. – Few have been more exempt from the disagreeables of life, while I may recount many bitter cups which I have had to take from time to time, yet I have been exempt from many which falls to the lot of Some in passing down the Stream of time. – We found our friends & relations at Newport in good health & comfortable in situation – Father & Mother Rodman tho’ aged are Smart & now free from some trials which recently awaited them in Davids state of mind & the situation of his family – he having removed to Lynn & is more comfortable in mind & a pretty good prospect of maintaining himself & family. –

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS



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September 22, Thursday: Alexis de Tocqueville made an entry in his journal about juries. He and Gustave de Beaumont heard from [Francis \(Franz\) Lieber](#): “We Europeans, we think to create republics by organizing a great political assembly. The Republic on the contrary, is of all the governments the one that depends most on every part of society ... If an obstacle embarrasses the public way, the neighbors will at once constitute themselves a deliberative body; they will name a commission and will remedy the evil by their collective force, wisely directed ... For my part, I feel myself inclined to believe ... that constitutions and political laws are nothing in themselves. They are dead creations to which the morals and the social position of the people alone can give life.”

They asked Lieber about the purity of American morals:

We asked him: Is it true that morals are as pure here as they pretend?

He replied: Morals are less good in the lower classes than among the enlightened; however, I think them superior to those of the same classes in Europe. As for the educated, their morals are as perfect as it is possible to imagine them. I don't believe that there is a single intrigue in Boston society. A woman suspected would be lost. The women there are, however, very coquettish; they even display their coquetry with greater boldness than with us because they know that they cannot go beyond a certain point, and that no one believes that they overstep that bound. After all, I like still better our women of Europe with their weaknesses, than the glacial and egotistical virtue of the Americans.

Q. To what do you attribute the unbelievable master that one obtains here over the passions?

A. To a thousand causes: to their physical constitution, to Puritanism, to their habits of industry, to the absence of an unemployed and corrupted class, such as a garrison for example, to the early marriages, to the very construction of the houses, which renders the secret of an illicit liaison almost impossible to keep.

Q. They say that the young men are not sages before marriage.

A. No. They are even, like the English, gross in their tastes, but like them they make a complete separation between the society in which they habitually live, and that which serves their pleasure. These are like two worlds which have nothing in common together. The young men never seek to seduce honest women.



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In England, a Reform Bill passed in the House of Commons.

Hackney coaches had been introduced in London in 1625 to ply for hire, and in 1634 Captain Baily had placed four such coaches at the Maypole in the Strand. A Lost-and-Found Office had in 1815 been established to deal with items left accidentally in these public coaches. On this day all restrictions, as to the numbers of such coaches for hire that might ply the streets of the municipality, were lifted. Taxi!

In [Rhode Island](#), the [Providence Journal](#) ran a very small report at the end of its news columns of this fatal local “affray” involving a “large mob.” The newspaper’s primary focus remained, however, on the larger events of the “Insurrection in North Carolina.” Although it had not been confirmed that the blacks had burned the city of Wilmington, the current estimate was that half the whites of the town had been killed. The slaves were supposedly sweeping across two counties, burning and killing as they went. The [Journal](#) reprinted a letter praising white citizens who were taking “vigorous measures” against these black “offenders.” This letter concluded with “I foresee that this land must become a field of blood.” That day’s issue of the [American](#) provided a lengthier account of the Providence “RIOT AND MURDER,” blaming white sailors for having instigated this confrontation. That day, also, the [American](#) published a letter, apparently from one of the rioters, asserting that the “Negroes armed themselves and fired upon four sailors,” and that the crowd had destroyed only the homes of these “foul-blooded” murderers. As the neighborhood was “worse than the celebrated Five Points District in New York, our populace are determined to level” the remaining houses. The anonymous writer’s main argument, justifying the demolitions, was the one that was so successful in 1824: that the neighborhood evil could be remedied only by gentrification, on a scale not contemplated since King Philip’s War. That evening a mob of 700 or 800 whites destroyed six more of the properties along Olney’s Lane while the sheriff, constables, and Town Council watched, now and again ordering the rioters to cease and desist. Governor James Fenner called out a militia company, and late that night 25 militiamen arrived. Pausing only to free rioters whom the authorities arrested, the mob finished off Olney’s Lane and proceeded to Snow Town, which most likely was somewhere near what is now the University of Rhode Island. They destroyed two houses there, dispersing around 4AM. The militia succeeded in taking only seven of the white rioters into custody.

Having arrived back at the [Quaker](#) educational institution that eventually would become the “[Moses Brown School](#)” in [Providence](#) from his visit to his old haunts in [Newport, Rhode Island](#), Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) was settling in and taking care of business — and it becomes abundantly clear from his entry in his journal that in the nice white “Quaker close” of religious righteousness that they had set up for themselves, the fact that there were race riots going on in the less beautiful side of downtown Providence just across the river from the meetinghouse was none of their concern.

5th day 22 of 9 M / Preparative Meeting, the Boys attended but there was so much of a prospect of a Storm that the Girls staid at home – I have thought proper to stay most of this day in my chamber & keep my leg up –it has been more comfortable than Yesterday but is still poorly. –

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS



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September 23, Friday: [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#)'s AIDS TO REFLECTION, 2d edition.

AIDS TO REFLECTION

In [Rhode Island](#), the [Providence Journal](#) ran a two-inch article on “RIOT” at the end of its news columns, noting that a mob of hundreds had “defeated civil and military authority.” An article headed “NEGRO CONSPIRACY” revealed that actually there had been “no overt rebellion” in [North Carolina](#) at all — though most of the slaves in two counties there had indeed been plotting to embark upon such a course. This Providence newspaper offered its readers a reprint of an article from New Haven, Connecticut, to the effect that the blacks there had, notwithstanding many benevolent efforts to educate them, “imbibed the notion that they were oppressed.” Like the blacks of Providence, the blacks of New Haven had acquired this inordinate concern over their “dignity,” and they were now demanding an “equal standing in society.” They had actually purchased land in the city of New Haven, and were actually in the process of founding a black college! A New Haven city meeting had resolved unanimously that since such a black college would of course support the abolition of human slavery, for them to tolerate the creation of such a local institution would amount to violating the rights of the Southern states, for which slavery was a legal institution. Furthermore, having such a black institution in the town of New Haven would bring Yale College to ruination. The white citizens of the town were vowing to resist such nefarious activity “by every lawful means,” as well they should.

That day the seven jailed white rioters were released. However, a white mob, unaware that they had been released, was preparing to storm the jail to rescue them. There were six companies of militiamen around the jail, amounting to 130 soldiers. Finally the mob’s belligerent spokesmen were persuaded that the jail was already empty, and the mob dispersed.



September 24, Saturday: In [Rhode Island](#), the [Providence American](#) was pleased to report that “precautions” against new riots had “proved effectual.” It enjoined “every orderly citizen” to “lend his influence” to prevent further such disorder. The [Providence Journal](#) provided at the head of its news column a short, factual account of the local rioting. It also reprinted an uncompromising defense of the New Haven Negro college. The [Providence Patriot and Columbia Phenix](#) published a relatively calm account of the “RIOT,” beginning with the “murder” attributed to “some Negro inhabitant.” That night, however, nearly 1,000 white rioters marched across the Smith Street bridge and over Smith Hill to finish off Snow Town, trailed by about another 1,000 white spectators. As the militia of 130, including some cavalry and artillery, countermarched from the bridge to the hill and back, the crowd encompassed them, swallowed them up, and all but disintegrated their ranks. At one point a white citizen snatched a militia rifle and the two men tumbled down a 20-foot bank while struggling with each other. Several militiamen and dozens of rioters scrambled down to aid them, and the militia barely fought its way out. The rioters threw every stone they could find, injuring some members. The sheriff read the riot act as preparation for opening fire on the citizens. As before, the crowd responded with various insults, including “Fire and be damned.” Firing into the air merely enabled the abuse to continue. Half the crowd turned to destroying a house, while the others tormented the militia as they tried to form a line from the bridge up the hill. When the militia pleaded that they were about to disintegrate, the governor, sheriff, and officers announced that they would fire if the mob would not disperse. Greeted only with defiance, Governor Fenner gave the order to fire. The militia fired, one volley, and four young white men fell dead: a sailor, a bookbinder, a paperhanger, and an apprentice. The crowd then dispersed.



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 September 25, Sunday: On a [Rhode Island](#) Sunday there were of course no newspapers, but a special Town Meeting was held in [Providence](#) that nevertheless succeeded in attracting 3,000 white citizens (most of them not property owners, and thus having no privilege to vote at such an assembly, but interested to hear anyway what was being decided in this tense interracial situation by their betters).

RACISM

Of course, this being the Lord's Day, and Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) being a [Quaker](#), we find there to be no concern of any kind expressed in his journal, in regard to these nearby political goings-on and racial anguishings:

*1st day 25 of 9 M / Silent Meetings all day - I sat in AM but
my Leg & knee were not very comfortable-*

God was in his Heaven, the Quakers were in their quietistic Close, and all was well!

 September 26, Monday: The [Providence American](#) emphasized the overriding issue for [Rhode Island](#), of respect for "interests and property" — even the interests and property of persons of "suspicious reputation." The [Providence Journal](#) wrote in favor of the rule of law, and heaped praise on the militia for having restored order. The Journal pointed out that the officials and militiamen had opened fire only with the greatest reluctance, and only when the crowd seemed ready to disarm them, thereby arming itself. The rioting citizens have been provided with adequate warning, and had even shouted, defiantly, "Fire if you dare!" It was good that we had "taught a rebellious portion of our community that they owed an allegiance to the laws." Thomas Sekell and Ezekiel Burr placed brief notices in the [Journal](#) denying rumors that they had secretly armed the mob. Burr pointed out, in proof of this, that he had himself owned one of the houses the mob had destroyed. At the convention of the Anti-Masonic Party in [Baltimore](#), 126 delegates approved a slate of candidates for the national election. This was one of the very first experiments in such nominations by convention.

The Conference of London granted to Greece a northern border going from Arta to Volos.



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September 27, Tuesday: The 1st passenger railroad in Scotland opened between Glasgow and Garnkirk.

[Fryderyk Franciszek Chopin \(Frédéric François Chopin\)](#) arrived in Paris after a 2-week trip from Stuttgart.

The [Providence Journal](#) presented only a short, platitudinous editorial on the riots. [Newport, Rhode Island's Democratic Rhode Island Republican](#) praised Governor Fenner's decision to open fire on the white mob, explaining that liberty, law, and authority were "intimately blended" — were indeed as inseparable as the Holy Trinity. That newspaper provided extracts from Rhode Island's royal charter, still in effect, by which the governor had been authorized "to kill, slay and destroy, by all fitting ways" any who "enterprize the destruction, invasion, detriment or annoyance" of Rhode Islanders. The [American's](#) story of "Another Riot" was truly ambivalent, for while it lamented that "this neat and beautiful village has become one mass of ruin," and its "virtuous and orderly citizens deprived of their dwelling," the race it denounced was the black one that had been deprived, rather than the white one that had done the depriving. Providence's blacks, rather than its whites, were characterized as having been "unusually bold" and as having "repeatedly defied civil authority."

Of course, the Providence [Quaker](#) being safe in their quietistic "Close" up on College Hill, we find no concern whatever being expressed in the journal of Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) in regard to these nearby political goings-on and racial anguishings:

*3rd day 27th of 9th M 1831 / My leg & knee gets better so slowly,
that I hardly know whether to conclude it is better from Day to
Day or not.*

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS



September 28, Wednesday: Oliver Cromwell had in 1657 signed a writ of privy seal establishing a university at Durham in England, but this institution had upon the Restoration of the monarchy been suppressed. On this day a new university was founded in Durham by the bishop, by an act of chapter (the parliament sanctioned this, it would receive the royal assent during the following year, and the institution would be able to open its doors in 1833).

The Anti-Masonic convention in [Baltimore](#) nominated William Wirt for president and Amos Ellmaker of Pennsylvania for vice president. Those secretive Masons, for sure we weren't going to let them get away with anything!⁹

In [Rhode Island](#), the [Democratic Patriot](#) sadly approved of the action of the local white militia. It was good that they had fired on the [Providence](#) mob. However, it was also fitting that the white mob had been allowed to deconstruct the black residences along Olneys Lane, that had been such an "annoyance" to "the most respectable part."

No trace of an awareness of any general social problem is to be detected in this diary report by [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) of local [Quaker](#) goings-on:

*4th day 28th of 9 M / Our Moy [Monthly] Meeting held in
[Providence](#) was a good one all our Scholars [[the Quaker youths
at the Institution](#)] attended - Wm Almy & Anna A Jenkins were
very acceptable in testimony & Hannah Robinson also had a good
little testimony to bear - & life was prevalent over the Meeting.*

9. Wirt would obtain, basically from Mason-haters, only 100,715 votes, amounting to 7 electoral votes, whereas Andrew Jackson would obtain, basically from slavery-lovers, 701,780 votes, amounting to 219 electoral votes.



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– In the last Meeting the buisness was conducted in a solid Manner - two or three certificates were received & A friend applied for his children to be taken under care of Friends - A young man Also applied to be received into membership. –

 September 29, Thursday: Most [Rhode Island](#) papers printed with approbation the report of the investigating committee of notables that had been appointed at Sunday's [Providence](#) Town Meeting. The committee's report brought many facts together coherently, but cautioned that it had only heard the sailors' side of the argument, not the blacks' side. The setting of the riots was described as a Babylon of "indiscriminate mixtures of whites" and "idle blacks of the lowest stamp," whose persistent "midnight revels" and "bloody affrays" had been disturbing the slumbers of the "respectable." The report provided a list of the dead and wounded, and a list of the destroyed houses and who had owned them. One slumlord who had lost a rental property was William Staples, a lawyer who had represented the 1824 rioters and had risen to become Rhode Island's Chief Justice. Another of the slum rental properties in question, it turned out, was owned by Nicholas Brown. A series of Town Meetings would quickly prepare and approve a city charter, with councilmen elected by ward and a mayor who could jail anyone for 24 hours, search houses, and dissolve riots.

 December 3, Saturday: In Lyon, France, manufacturing had been so depressed that artisans were able to earn only eightpence by working an 18-hour day. Desperate, on November 22d the workers had driven the military from the town. On this day Marshal Soult marched an army of 40,000 with 100 cannon into town to restore order and submission — a gesture that would prove more than adequate (it didn't seem to occur to him that he might have succeeded just as well with 40,000 loaves of bread and 100 fishes).

In Cincinnati, Ohio, Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont interviewed Salmon Portland Chase.

In [Providence, Rhode Island](#), the Browns, a local family of free blacks, buried their mother Alice Prophet Greene Brown and faced an even more uncertain future:

PAGES 102-121: I [[William J. Brown](#)] now thought it time for me to look for a place to learn a trade, and my readers will at once see the hindrances I met with in every effort I made in that direction. My mother had just died, after a short illness; her burial occurring on the 3d of December, 1831, which caused a great change in our family. This change made me the more anxious to secure a good place to learn my trade. My first call was on a Mr. Knowles, a first-class carpenter, to see if he would take me as an apprentice to the trade. His excuse was that he had but little work, and that he was going to close up business. I next applied to a Mr. Langley, a shoemaker, to see if he would learn me the shoe business; but he refused without giving me an excuse. I made application to several gentlemen doing business, for a chance to work, but all refused me, giving some very frivolous excuse. I could readily see that the people were determined not to instruct colored people in any art. I next called on Mr. Ira B. Winsor, a grocery man. Making known to him my wants I gained his sympathy, and a promise to do what he could for me. His promise to hire me as a clerk encouraged me very



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much. He had first to consult his uncle, who was his guardian, before he could give me a decided answer. His uncle bitterly opposed his hiring a black boy while there were so many white boys he could get. This objection of his uncle displeased him much, and he told him if he could not have me he would have none. So he never hired a clerk. I often went in and helped wait on customers. This, however, did not suit me. I wanted something permanent that I could depend on for future support, not to be shifting to various kinds of employ as I had been doing. Other boys of my acquaintance, with little or no education, jerked up instead of being brought up, were learning trades and getting employments, and I could get nothing. It seemed singular to me at first. I soon found it was on account of my color, for no colored men except barbers had trades, and that could hardly be called a trade. The white people seemed to be combined against giving us any thing to do which would elevate us to a free and independent position. The kindest feelings were manifested towards us in conversation, and that was all. I was now seventeen years old, and was at a loss to know what steps to take to get a living, for if I possessed the knowledge of a Demosthenes or Cicero, or Horace, or Virgil, it would not bring to me flattering prospects for the future. To drive carriage, carry a market basket after the boss, and brush his boots, or saw wood and run errands, was as high as a colored man could rise. This seemed to be the only prospect lying in my path. Some of my associates worked for eight or ten dollars a month, but what would that small pittance be to them, settled down in life with, a family to support, if they should have long continued sickness to contend with. This wouldn't suit me; I must go somewhere else to find employ. I now commenced the study of bookkeeping, thinking it would be of use to me sometime. I continued my study one year, when I had a chance to get work with a wealthy lawyer, to take care of his office and bedroom, paying me five dollars a month, and extra pay for all extra work done. I was told that he was a very cross man, and difficult to please, and often very abusive. Several good men had tried him, but could not suit him and had left. I concluded to try him. My father thought it was useless for me to try, but still if I did I must give him half of my wages.... Mr. Greene was much pleased with my work. After working for him three months his cousin, William C. Greene, hired the house and rented him a room in it. He had a large family; kept a cook, chamber maid and housekeeper, as his wife's health was very delicate. He said to me one morning, "William, I want to make a bargain with you to work for me. My chamber maid is going away on a visit and will be absent two months or more. I want you to do all the errands that my folks want done, and split some wood for them, (I believe they are now out,) and anything Miss Paris wants you to do, do it, and I will pay you. As soon as you have done Mr. Richard Greene's work in the morning, you can get your breakfast here, and then be in readiness to do the chores." I told him that I went to school, but would do what I could between school hours. This arrangement



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pleased him, and I commenced with him that day, doing whatever I was called upon to do. After working for six weeks I made out and presented my bill at his office; he being away, I left it on the office desk. I had been very careful in netting down my charges, as I was to be paid for going on errands a certain sum each time, never higher than twelve cents or lower than six. He was quite displeased with the bill, refusing to pay it. I was very calm, and told him I thought my charges were reasonable; but I did not wish to cherish hard feelings, one towards the other. I then submitted the prices of my work to his judgment; he seemed much pleased with my mild way of speaking, and said he would take my bill and fix the prices, and let me know when he was ready; and I could keep on doing his work as usual. In about three weeks he sent for me to come to his counting room. I went down and found my bill ready for settlement, but he had reduced the bill from six and a half to two dollars, allowing me three cents for every errand this side of the bridge, above Market Square, and ten cents an hour for cutting wood. As he was willing to be governed by these prices in the future, I receipted the bill and took my pay, which was \$2.50. In two months and a half the maid returned, and as my services were no longer required, I went away, made out my bill and carried it to the office. Some two weeks passed, when his clerk, meeting me, said that Mr. Greene wanted to see me. I went to his office and found him fretting about my bill. I asked him if he could find any charge on the bill which did not correspond with the dates on the books where the purchases were made. If he did I would alter the bill; but if he found it to be of the same date the purchases were made, I could make no change in the bill. Finding nothing to justify his belief, he paid me and I left him. I was without work some three months. I then applied to Enos Freeman, a colored man who had just opened a shop to repair shoes. He said he was unable to keep a man; he could hardly take care of himself by his trade, as he had just commenced business. I told him I wanted to learn the trade and if he would learn me I would board myself. He told me to come and he would learn me all he knew about it. I went home and told father; he was much pleased about it and said if I would go there and learn my trade he would board me. He said if he had learned the trade he could have made four or five dollars a day where he had been in foreign countries. I commenced and learned very fast. At the close of that year Mr. Freeman was taken sick and after a short illness died. I purchased all his tools of his half brother, Geo. Peters, determined to work until I could raise means to go away, which would take about eighteen months. My custom increased and promised great success. I had the waiters' work from the City Hotel, Franklin and Mansion House, besides waiters that lived in private families; and the prospect was that if my business continued good, I would have a sufficient amount of money at the appointed time to travel with, to some place where I could make a permanent living, for I was determined to go to some place where my prospects would be more encouraging. I also began to



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think that if I could be more successful in business, I would like to get married. But old people would say that it is very difficult to keep the pot a-boiling; so I concluded to make an effort to test my powers to do extra work. Then if I should be compelled to resort to that method to support a family, it would not be a new-thing to me. And if I succeeded in performing extra labors I would get married, and if not I would remain single a while longer. I commenced working nights until 12 o'clock, then replenish the fire and rest while it was kindling. Then it would be warm enough to commence work again. I followed it up one week, but the last night the fire did not burn very fast, and in waiting for it to kindle I fell asleep, and being near the stove I began to make one of my graceful bows until my head gently touched the stove, and to my great discomfort burnt my forehead, nose and chin, which speedily aroused me, as the pain was quite severe, taking a portion of skin off my forehead so that I could not work for an hour or two. I continued working for two weeks to see if I could endure the extra task. One night while resting I fell asleep and dreamed that a man entered the shop to kill me. I awoke, looked round, saw nothing, fell asleep and dreamed it again; and again the third time dreamed the same over again. Being startled by the dreary I awoke and found my shop on fire, all in a bright flame. I looked to see where the fire originated; learning the cause I soon put it out with my shoe tub of water. A piece of canvas belonging to father was hanging up in the shop; he had used it a few days before when he spun oakum for Captain Bullock's ship which was under repair, intending to take it home in a few days. One end of it got unrolled and fell to the floor, and moving my bench it got dragged out; the room was very warm and the candle melted and falling on the floor set it on fire and nearly consumed it. After putting the fire out I went home and spent the rest of the night. I felt that I had been working at night long enough to warrant success in supporting a family. Another important matter I must settle was to leave the company I had been with so long, and break off from the Tuesday night Society. Many had watched me from the time I joined the church and I had to be reserved in my deportment, for they well knew how I used to be; I allowed no one to insult me or make useless threats. I found much difficulty in this respect.... In the summer time work was very scarce, and I did any work I could get to do. In the winter season I had a plenty to do; as customers must have dry feet. In the summer I was without work half of the time. I could not stay at home and wait for work to come in, so I went out and looked for any thing I could find.... Passing Mrs. Helme's on George street, I saw in front of her door a cord of wood; I called in and engaged to saw and put it in the woodshed. I put it in the yard and sawed the most of it that night, finishing it the next morning.... I was out of work and knew I must find something to do to get us some food. I took some soap and a bucket of clothes, and with my sleeves rolled up went toward the college, inquiring for work as I went along, finding none. At the college I rapped on a student's room door and asked



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for work, also at a door where a young man wanted his bedstead cleaned and floor washed, which I did; he then wanted some painting done, that I also did; earning four dollars and a half for the job.

I was again out of work, and went out to look for more, but did not find any; on returning home my wife asked me what luck I had, I answered none; she said she had found a job at the Boston and Providence R. R. depot; a man had called that afternoon and engaged her to go to work in the morning. I said I would go and help her; we went, taking such things as we needed. I asked the gentleman what he wanted done. He said the ceiling, sides and floor of the office cleaned.... I continued and finished every room in the building in eleven days, which, at \$1.50 a day, amounted to sixteen dollars and a half....

I found that other jobs kept coming in, from sources I little expected, yet I had not been able to get a sufficient sum to meet my arrears. I lived in a house belonging to a widow lady, and was back in rent fourteen dollars; she told me she had concluded to occupy the tenement herself, and as soon as I could to give it up; she lived up stairs. I soon learned that Barker & Wheaton wanted a man to dress new work. I made application for the place, telling them I heard they wanted a man; they said they did, and asked if I understood dressing new shoes with gum; I said I was a shoemaker by trade, but had never used any gum; they asked for recommendations; I said I had none, I had never worked for anybody to get one; they said they wanted a man that didn't have a lot of company coming into the shop, and one that would give no back talk when spoken to; I told them I never had anyone loafing around me, but if any one had business with me I expected to see them wherever I was, and as for back talk I never gave any, and if I did not suit a man I left him; one asked if I knew his barbers, James Scott and Charles Burrell; I said I was well acquainted with them; he said I will see them, and if they speak well of you, you come next Monday and I will let you know. The next Monday I went to the store and Mr. Barker said to me, Messrs. Burrell and Scott spoke well of you, and said you was just the man we wanted; we want you to come mornings and open the store, make the fire and sweep the room; for that we will pay one dollar a week; we want you to dress shoes with gum, and we will allow you twenty-five cents a case; when you assist in rolling leather, we will allow you one cent a boll; you need not close the store at night, we attend to that; we pay out money but once in three months for work; we sell and receive on three months' credit; if you can serve us on those terms you can begin next Monday morning; we want you to look out for the shop, let no one trouble our books; you must be dressed clean, for you will have to be in the front part of the shop. Very good, sir, I will commence next Monday morning, I said. Mr. B. said, when you come go up stairs to Mr. Wheaton's room, rap on the door, and he will give you the key; the shop must be opened by half past seven o'clock. Now, I wondered how I should get along for three months without any pay, as I had no means to sustain myself



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and family during the time; however, I thought I would trust the Lord and do the best I could, and if I got into straightened circumstances I might get some money of them, to keep me along until the three months were up. I told my wife if any work came in during the day to keep it and I would do it in the evening. I went to the store Monday morning, got the key and opened the store, made up a fire and put the store in order, as my employers would be in at half past eight o'clock; I then went around to see how everything was placed, as I was very near sighted, and did not wish them to know it for some time; as it was generally the case as soon as a person found I was near sighted, the next opinion would be that I was about blind. After learning the places of the different articles they would use during the day I sat down and waited for them to come in. Mr. Barker soon came in, walked around the store, and said, William, you have every thing in first rate order, I think you will suit us. I thanked him, saying I should endeavor to. Mr. Barker was a smaller man than, myself, very large in feeling, quick in motion, sharp in perception and would try to make one think he knew everything. Mr. Wheaton, his partner, was very tall and large in proportion; slow and easy in motion, dull in perception and moderate in appearance; you would think he knew but little; he did the business in the store, and Mr. Barker did the travelling business. Mr. Barker told oft to go to breakfast and return as soon as possible, as they had a great deal of work on hand. When I returned the first thing called for was a hammer, saw and chisel; I brought them, and when he finished put them back in their places. He opened two cases of shoes, and set me to work dressing them; he had two bottles, one of gum arabic to dress the bottoms to give them a lively red color, the other was gum tragacanth to dress the upper leather, making it look fresh and smooth; after having been shown how to dress the shoes I commenced doing precisely as I had been shown, and worked all day on that one case, and got only about two-thirds of it done. I thought if I made no better progress than that during the week I should leave off. The next day I finished that case and another one besides, and at the close of the week I was able to dress three cases a day; being particular to have him examine each case before they were repacked. When I went home nights I would find some work to be done to sustain myself the coming day. I now found that I was obliged to put in practice that which I was once trying as an experiment, working nights. Some nights I would work until eleven o'clock, and other nights until after midnight; by this means I was enabled to keep along nearly two months. One morning while waiting I felt drowsy, and when Mr. Barker came in he suddenly opened the door, and said what is the matter, William, are you sick? I said, no, sir; He said, what makes you so dull, did you not have sleep enough last night? I said, no, sir. He asked what time I retired? I answered three o'clock this morning. He said what was you doing that you did not go to bed before, as you ought to? I said, I am obliged to work nights to support myself and family, as you could pay me



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no money for three months. He said that is too bad, we cannot get our money until it is due, but if you or any of your friends want shoes, we will let you have them at wholesale prices and credit them to your account, and you can receive the money. When the three months expired I made out my bill, setting down each day's work, the number of cases of shoes I had dressed each day, and presented it for settlement. It was examined by my employers and they wanted to know who made it out for me? I said I always kept my own accounts and made out my own bills. They said they had no idea I could write such a fine hand, for neither of them could begin to write like it. My work came to over eighty dollars, and they settled it, lacking ten dollars. I then could settle up some of my back debts; the first was my rent, amounting to twenty-one dollars. My landlady was much pleased at receiving her rent in full, and said I need not move as she had concluded to remain up stairs, and had concluded that she should never tell me to move the second time, and as soon as I could better myself, to do so. I was soon able to dress six cases a day. I commenced the second quarter by putting down the balance due, ten dollars, and the charges underneath. I sold twelve pair of shoes, which I took out of the store, to my neighbors, and with the balance due on the last quarter I sustained myself until the second quarter was up. I carried in my bill, which was over eighty dollars, that was paid, (keeping out a balance of eight dollars); the sum enabled me to meet all my back debts so that I was not compelled to sit up nights to work. After commencing on the third quarter, one day while dressing shoes, Mr. Barker came on one side of me and Mr. Wheeler on the other; Mr. B. said, William, how long have you been working for us? I said nearly nine months. He said, I think you are a very honest person. That is what I always try to be, I said. Mr. B. said, if some men were working here and trusted as we trust you, they would carry off a great many dollars worth of boots and shoes. I said I have no doubt of it, some people are just so foolish; you would certainly know if they took away any of your property. He said, how would we know it unless we saw them? I said, don't you have an invoice of every thing that comes into your shop on your books, and every article you sell is on your sales book, and when you post your books and take an inventory of your effects, every article that has not been sold must be in your store, and if they are not found in your store somebody must have taken them, and who would be accused but me? it would fall on my shoulders; you have given me liberty to take any shoes that I wanted and charge them to myself, and I have done so, charging them to my account, and when I presented my bill you have seen the credit given of what I had drawn. He asked me where I got this knowledge of doing business? I said, I attended school and studied bookkeeping. He asked, how long I went to school? I replied, until I was twenty years old. He said, no wonder you are so well posted; you ought to know something about business. I want to ask you, Billy, if you have ever taken any change out of the drawer and forgot to tell Mr. Wheaton about it, or made



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change for any one and made a mistake, as you cannot see very well. I answered, I had not troubled his drawer, either to get change for my own use or any one; I had no business with your drawer, and if I wanted any money I should ask you for it. Mr. Wheaton said, I told you that I didn't think William had taken any money out of the drawer; the mistake has come by me, I have not been particular enough in setting down the postage I paid out. Mr. Barker said we have found a little discrepancy in our accounts in posting up our books; we can't strike a balance of four dollars and a half, and thought we would mention it to you, thinking you might have taken some change out of the drawer and forgot to mention it to Mr. Wheaton. I worked there fifteen months, when the firm failed and made an assignment. Thinking business was closed with them, I made out my bill and presented it to Mr. Barker, who said he had closed up business, but to leave my bill and he would settle it in a week or so; (the amount was seventy-one dollars). When I called to settle with them, Mr. B. said, I have got your bill made out from the time you commenced until you closed, embracing fifteen months; you have made a great mistake in your bill; we owe you a balance of twenty-two dollars, and if you receipt the bill you can get your money now. That made a reduction on my account of forty-nine dollars. I said I didn't think I had made any mistake. I examined his bill, and well knew there was something about it. I asked him to let me have ten dollars and I would go home and look over my accounts and see what the difficulty was. He said he would not pay a cent until he paid the whole, and that would be when I receipted the bill. I asked him for the bill to take home for examination and would return it the next day. He said if I would do that I could take it. I promised I would and took it and went home, there copied the bill and returned it to him the next morning, and said I would see him the latter part of the week; I having a copy of his bill, and from my account, I saw that he had altered the charges I made; when I dressed six cases, he put down four, and when I dressed four, he put down two and three, and proceeded on, carrying out the bill fifteen months. I took the amount I had received and subtracted it from the amount due, and it came to seventy-one dollars, just like the balance on my former bill; I took the amount of credit he had allowed for fifteen months, added my account with it, which increased it forty-two dollars; for he copied his credit from my former bills—he just cited the amount due me on his account and went on with the bill, without noticing that I had reckoned the money, and by this means I trapped him. I called again and told him I was ready to settle, and explained to him what he had done to deceive me. When he found himself trapped, he said, well, Billy, I will settle it to suit you and give you seventy-one dollars; he was glad to back out in that way. I was again without any work; I had stopped repairing shoes so long that my customers had gone elsewhere; I went about to see what I could find to do, when Royal Faruum met me and said, your people have failed. I said yes, sir; he inquired what I was doing now? I told him I



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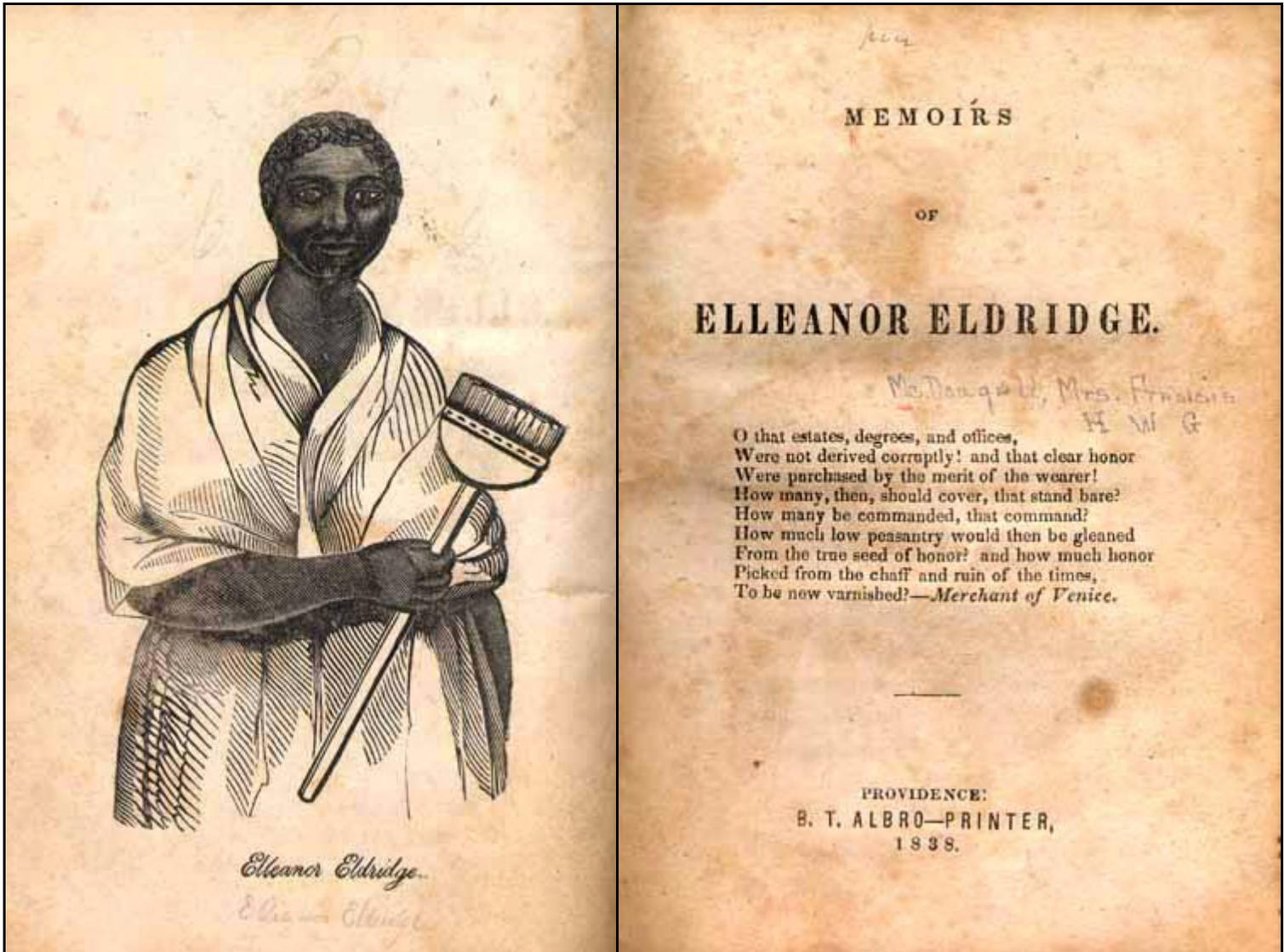
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was trying to find something to do. He kept shop on South Main, above Planet street, and was connected with a Philadelphia line of packets; kept ship stores and seamen's clothing. I went into his store and he showed me a large number of small size boots and shoes he could not sell (having sold his larger sizes); he said, if you will oil, dress and sell these shoes I will give you half you make. I accepted the offer, went to work on them, and was kept very busy some three months.

(We can see in the above the reality that lay behind Frederick Douglass's observation that in certain respects people of color in the antebellum northern society had moved from being the slaves of individuals to becoming "slaves of the community.")

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)**WILLIAM J. BROWN****WILLIAM J. BROWN****1838**

The MEMOIRS OF ELLEANOR ELDRIDGE, one of the few narratives of the life of an early 19th-century free black woman, was published in [Providence, Rhode Island](#) by B.T. Albro, Printer. This had been transcribed for Elleanor Eldridge (1784-1845?), who had been gifted with no formal education whatever, by Mrs. Frances Harriet Whipple Green McDougall (1805-1878).



It is probable that [William J. Brown](#) knew of this book and was able to draw upon it as a model, since he was living during the same period and as a member of the same free black community and since, like her, he was



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a lineal descendant of the Narragansett native American family named Prophet, if not of Thomas Prophet himself.

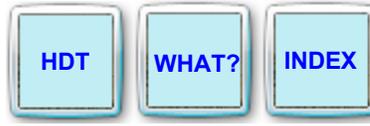
1841

June 26, Saturday: According to [William J. Brown](#), the last Black Election Day celebration in [Rhode Island](#) occurred in this year during the turmoil of the Dorr War.¹⁰

Traditional public festivals such as black Election Days continued well into the nineteenth century. According to [William J. Brown](#), the last black Election Day in the [Providence](#) region was in 1841. Interestingly, First of August celebrations occurred shortly thereafter. The [Providence Daily Journal](#) began recording West Indian Emancipation festivals in 1844. While First of August parades partly drew upon some of the traditions of Election Days, they were much more imbued with political and social context. Whereas black Election Days demonstrated much more plebeian, carnivalesque practices (albeit, as we shall see, with important social and political meanings), First of August celebrations specifically addressed salient political and social issues confronting blacks in the Atlantic world. In this way, this critical transformation in black public life did more than promote a black politics of protest, as Patrick Rael contends. British West Indian Emancipation celebrations nurtured a transnational black Atlantic consciousness. Whereas scholars such as William Pierson demonstrate the syncretic nature of black Election days, particularly how black participants drew upon African traditions (and in this regard these public festivals have their connection with other colonial black plebeian festivals such as Pinkster in New York and New Jersey, West Indian Emancipation celebrations reflected a different moral, social, and political consciousness that moved away from its African connections and addressed contemporary concerns that effected blacks in the Anglo-American black Atlantic.

If we are to follow [William J. Brown](#)'s description of the final days of black Election Days, we can see the benign as well as potentially politically and socially explosive content of these traditional New England cultural practices. Black Election Days in the Providence area annually occurred on the last Saturday of June [in 1841, June 26th], following white election days, but more critically at the end of the planting season. In this regard, black Election Days were connected to other harvest day celebrations where leisure, festivities, and fun followed an intense labor season. Some scholars have interpreted these election days as "safety-valves" where blacks in New England created their own public space to demonstrate ideas about

10. The holiday function soon would be assumed by the 1st of August, West Indian Emancipation Day.



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political and social order, thereby reinforcing traditional white slave-master rule.¹¹ Other scholars have focused on the interracial nature of these public festivals where white plebeians and blacks participated in the festivities. Indeed, these historians contend that the decline of Election Days can be attributed to rising racial and class tensions produced by immigration and industrialization. They maintain that the decline of black Election days corresponded with the emergence of a white working class with vested racial interests (and who would later find their leisure activities absorbed by racially charged minstrel shows), and a black bourgeoisie that promoted a politics of racial uplift and moral rectitude invested in asserting its authority and legitimacy over black plebeians who largely participated in these festival.¹²

Other scholars such as William Pierson draw connections to the ways elected Election Day governors and kings had direct ties to Africa, revealing the ways Anglo-American style election techniques (where not only the governors or kings were elected, but also his "officers," including lieutenant-governors and treasurers) were blended with African customs regarding authority, legitimacy, and status. In reflecting upon Eleanor Eldridge's experience with black Election Days, the stature of recently arrived Africans would support Pierson's argument. Eldridge's paternal grandfather was African, and her brother George was elected a black governor for four consecutive years. Moreover, her brother's election brought a regal-like status to Eleanor. As Eldridge's biographer Frances Greene noted, "As this title [of governor] was, in imitation of the whites, invested with considerable dignity, it follows that Eleanor stood among her people, in the very highest niche of the aristocracy. She always accompanied her brothers to these festivals, dressed in such style as became the sister of 'His Excellency'."¹³

According to [William J. Brown](#), white masters would make professional arrangements with local tavern-keepers, securing rooms to hold elections and festivities following the governor's parade, and providing refreshments for election participants. Thereafter, the participants themselves would pay for food and drink during the celebration while the governor or king held "court." In the black Elections around [Providence](#), Brown recalled that the events followed a regular schedule, with officers being elected, and then marching through the streets around 11:00 in the morning. The governor and his council were "accompanied by music" and "would march up and down the road, after which they would retire to the tavern and refresh themselves, then take up a collection and dismiss until dinner;

11. Joseph P. Reidy, "Negro Election Day and Black Community Life in New England, 1750-1860," [Marxist Perspectives](#), Vol. 1 (Fall 1978), 102-117.

12. David Roediger, *THE WAGES OF WHITENESS: RACE AND THE MAKING OF THE AMERICAN WORKING CLASS* (NY: Verso, 1991, 1993), 102-105; Shane White, *SOMEWHAT MORE INDEPENDENT: THE END OF SLAVERY IN NEW YORK CITY, 1770-1810* (Athens GA: U of Georgia P, 1991), 95-106; Shane White, "'It was a Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834," [The Journal of American History](#), Vol. 81, No. 1 (June, 1994), 13-50.

13. Frances Green, *MEMOIRS OF ELLEANOR ELDRIDGE* (Providence: B.T. Albro, 1838), 33.



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after dinner they would amuse themselves any way they choose until the time for dancing.”¹⁴ Brown described the elections as raucous events where anyone who had “any animosity against another, male or female,” would “pay of their old debts by fighting.” William Pierson’s study of black Election Days throughout New England suggests that not all of these contentious issues were settled in this way, and the governors or kings and their councils would adjudicate these cases in a more sober manner.¹⁵ Moreover, the decisions resolved by the elected officials were accepted, becoming customary “law” in the local community, thereby reinforcing the importance of these black Election Days as a black public sphere that maintained social, political, and cultural power. Furthermore, that William Brown does not identify the participants as either slaves or freedmen and women (an issue further supported by our knowledge that both George and Elleanor Eldridge, free blacks living in Warwick and [Providence](#), participated in black Election Days around the time Brown recollected these events) reveals that Election Day festivities were not simply “safety valves” to release tensions between dominant and subordinate groups, nominally lubricating the hegemonic position of the white elite. Since black Election Day was celebrated into the 1830s, a period when the majority of African Americans in [Rhode Island](#) were free, their popularity suggests that these festivals were widely accepted among blacks from different statuses and social conditions as a way to carve out black public space. William Brown argued that the more “pious did not care about attending” Election Day parades, but knowing that such morally reputable women like Elleanor Eldridge frequently attended these festivities illustrates that these celebrations remained popular among the black community in the early nineteenth century.

Nonetheless, black Election Days abruptly ended in 1841 in the Providence area according to [William J. Brown](#) as a result of a riot provoked by the mistreatment of an elected officer. Election Day began innocently enough, following the traditions of elections and the parade, but when “a very dark man mounted on a horse and sword at his side, introduced himself as General Amey” and rode around town for half an hour, he “ordered the hostler to put up his horse” while he went into a local tavern. As Brown related, General Amey then “walked up to the bar and regaled himself; then walked around among the assembled crowd like some officer in authority, but finding no one willing to acknowledge him as bearing rule over them, again went out and ordered the hostler to get his horse,” which he did according to orders. General Amey’s perplexity over the lack of respect received demonstrates both the racial fissures of black Election Day and the ways these plebeian festivities lost the potency

14. William J. Brown, *THE LIFE OF WILLIAM J. BROWN, OF PROVIDENCE, R.I.; WITH PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF INCIDENTS IN RHODE ISLAND*, IN *PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND* (Providence RI: Angel & Co., Printers), 13.

15. William Pierson, *BLACK YANKEES: THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AFRO-AMERICAN SUBCULTURE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NEW ENGLAND* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 129-140.



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they traditionally held. Black Election Days were plebeian festivals where a subordinate group was for a short period "on top" in a "world-turned-upside-down," a cultural (not to say political) practice that had a long history in Anglo-America and Europe. But after years of increasing racial tensions, including two race riots (Hardscrabble in 1824 and the Olney Street Riot in 1831), whites were not inclined to be deferential to black authority figures, regardless of the dramaturgical quality of black Election Day. Some white Rhode Islanders might go along with the "custom" but even they had their limits.

The hostler continued to take General Amey's horse as the general rode throughout the city, but now maintained that he should be paid for securing the general's horse. General Amey refused to pay the hostler, demanding to see the landlord of the facility that kept the horses, who in turn told him that it was the custom to remunerate the hostlers for their services. Again General Amey refused, and some "cross words passed between them when the landlord threw a half brick, hitting [General Amey] on the head. The General fell backward to the ground like one dead, and the cry soon went forth that General Amey was killed by the landlord."¹⁶ Pandemonium erupted. The subterranean political and social dimensions of black Election Days finally exploded. Even if white leaders thought these black public festivals were "safety-valves" to release social and labor tensions, the riot that followed General Amey's injury was not what they expected. Upon hearing the rumor that General Amey was dead, the general's brother "went like a madman after the man who killed his brother." When he reached the stable, General Amey returned to consciousness, and now "the two enraged brothers started for the landlord, who seeing them, fled into the house for refuge." The brothers charged and broke through the front door. The landlord was able to escape through a window in another room, and "was joined outside by twenty men, who armed themselves with sticks of wood." According to William Brown, "The two Ameys proceeded towards the landlord and his men who dropped their sticks and fled" towards the [Pawtuxet](#) River. Earlier, the landlord had set up a room in the tavern for Election Day festivities, and the brothers and other revelers proceeded to feast and drink, even "drinking up the landlord's liquor." After "regaling themselves" the brothers went to gather their belongings, only to be refused by the landlady, who had called upon her "help" to assist her to keep the brother's clothes. The women who had accompanied the Amey brothers then "overpowered" the landlady and her assistants, took the clothes and left for [Providence](#). The Amey brothers and other men who were participating in the festival stayed behind since they learned that the landlord "had gone after the Pawtuxet company of soldiers" and now "armed themselves with sticks of wood and formed themselves in a line, and awaited for the company." Soon they heard the fife and drum, and heard the captain of the guard order them to "surrender

16. William J. Brown, THE LIFE OF WILLIAM J. BROWN, OF PROVIDENCE, R.I.; WITH PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF INCIDENTS IN RHODE ISLAND, IN PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND (Providence RI: Angel & Co., Printers), 14-15.



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themselves prisoners” or he would fire upon them. The Election Day men refused and “told him cooley to fire if he pleased, but it would be the last firing he would live to do.” At this point, the political potency of Election Day fully manifested itself. Not simply a racial and social drama playing to pacified black and approving white audiences, General Amey clearly saw himself as a military figure leading men to a battle because white people failed to recognize his legitimacy and political authority. Confronting the [Pawtuxet](#) soldiers, he was fighting for his and his men’s honor, much like any other military leader leading his soldiers. The captain of the guard probably recognized this as well, for he and his company of soldiers left without confronting General Amey and his men.¹⁷

Matters remained quiet for a week, when General Almey’s brother told his employer Mr. Halsey (for whom he worked as a foreman) about what happened, and how he planned to return to Warwick to settle his account with the landlord of the tavern. Halsey tried to discourage him, but Almey’s brother insisted on making “amends.” The landlord received the brother, and said he needed a few minutes to gather the proper information. However, the “landlord immediately dispatched a messenger to [Pawtuxet](#), and a large number of men soon arrived, and locked [brother] Amey in jail.” Before Almey could be released, Mr. Halsey had to pay five hundred dollars “to settle the case.” As William Brown noted, “That was a death blow to the election. They tried several times to revive it, but failed in the attempt.”¹⁸

The violence and racial unrest unleashed by this particular black Election Day celebration undoubtedly discouraged future festivals. We can also see how the conviviality and frivolity of interracial plebeian public festivals that were once connected to a colonial culture and more heterogeneous social condition now appeared remote in the context of an increasingly racially divisive and socially tense urban North.¹⁹ However, black Election Days also came to an end in the 1830s in part because their function as a vehicle for demonstrating a black political and cultural presence in the public sphere lost its utility. Where these Election Days traditionally offered a space for “elected” black leaders to exert political and policing control over the black community and operated outside the broader social context, by the 1830s blacks wanted to use civil and political institutions to address issues affecting the black community in [Rhode Island](#) and the United States. West Indian Emancipation festivals combined the political and social consciousness of black associational life that was maturing in the 1830s with the frivolity and pleasure of traditional black

17. William J. Brown, *THE LIFE OF WILLIAM J. BROWN, OF PROVIDENCE, R.I.; WITH PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF INCIDENTS IN RHODE ISLAND*, IN PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND (Providence RI: Angel & Co., Printers), 16.

18. William J. Brown, *THE LIFE OF WILLIAM J. BROWN, OF PROVIDENCE, R.I.; WITH PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF INCIDENTS IN RHODE ISLAND*, IN PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND (Providence RI: Angel & Co., Printers), 17.

19. John Wood Sweet examines the transformation of interracial contact in the North in more detail, especially focusing on Bobalition pamphlets and white humor, recognizing that race riots such as the Hardscrabble Riot of 1824 influenced this transformation, and also affected democratic politics in the North. See John Wood Sweet, *BODIES POLITIC: NEGOTIATING RACE IN THE AMERICAN NORTH, 1730-1830* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003), 378-397.



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Election Days. First of August celebrations demonstrated that black Rhode Islanders could be politically assertive citizens while having fun at the same time.

The Providence Daily Journal began recording First of August celebrations in 1844, six years following the official end of [slavery](#) in the British Caribbean. The Daily Journal identified characteristics of these festivals that illustrate how they were connected to earlier black public events like Election Day and Fourth of July celebrations. But they also reflected ties to black civic and political organizations. In the August 3, 1844 edition of the newspaper, the Daily Journal wrote that “[t]he colored people of this city assembled to the number of several hundred yesterday in the grove in the Northern suburbs, when a picnic was spread and a celebration held in commemoration of the emancipation of the slaves in the British West Indies.” However, the gravity of the occasion required more than just a social gathering and feasting. As the paper wrote, “Addresses were made by several speakers, and every thing was conducted in an orderly and creditable manner. After the picnic a long procession composed of persons of both sexes, marched through the streets with banners and music.”²⁰

The newspaper’s description of the festival and parade is notable for a variety of reasons. While blacks traditionally claimed public space to demonstrate that they were part of the larger social fabric of the urban community since the colonial period with Election Days, they now used this space to celebrate a powerful event, the abolition of [slavery](#) in the British West Indies. As with Election Days, feasting, music, and enjoyment were integral to the event. People were encouraged to have a good time. But this solemn occasion also required sober behavior. Black behavior and morality as well as black politics were on public display, and it was critical that the celebration was “conducted in an orderly and creditable manner.” Unlike Election Day, First of August festivals were not coordinated around agricultural seasons, and were thus not tied to intense labor activities that might require an equally intense releasing of energy in leisure and festivities (the traditional “safety-valve argument”). The processional march, music, and banners all speak to the ways African Americans wanted their social and political ideas to be taken seriously by the broader community. The Daily Journal commented on one occasion upon the ways festival participants “marched through the streets in process with music and banners and made a very orderly and respectable appearance.”²¹ At another time, the paper noted that “music, banners, and processions were all in good taste, and [the participants] were all in good taste, and they made an excellent and creditable appearance as they marched through the streets.”²² As with any public display, there was a conscious dramaturgical quality to the processions. Precisely because

20. Providence Daily Journal, Saturday August 3, 1844.

21. Providence Daily Journal, Saturday August 2, 1845.

22. Providence Daily Journal, Monday August 3, 1846.



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negative racial stereotypes of urban free blacks circulated the white press in the forms of Bobalition pamphlets and popular culture in minstrel shows, African Americans sought to redefine those counterfeit views of race with more sobering and uplifting representations of black life. The multivalent character of, not to mention the presence of white authority in black Election Day festivals, left participants and viewers unclear whether the event was nothing more than a playful game (much as the African game of paw-paw that was often seen played during Election Day celebrations).²³ Black emancipation, however, was not a game, and the seriousness of the event required a level of engagement that was appropriate for the occasion. The procession, music, and banners may still have been a spectacle for viewers who watched the celebrants march through the city. However, they were observing a demonstration of political activity that honored black freedom, a far cry from the plebeian harvest festival of black Election Day. And as we will see momentarily, the addresses given by speakers not only directly referred to the significance of the event they were all celebrating, but also to the ways broader political movements in the British Caribbean also spoke to black life in other parts of the black Atlantic.

Significantly, First of August festivals were coordinated by the members of the black community where Election Days were financially controlled by whites and depended upon white leadership. The brief history of establishing their own churches and civic associations enabled blacks to develop an independent voice, one that became confident to assert itself in the public arena. While it is unclear to what degree [Providence](#)'s black associations contributed their leadership to West Indian Celebrations, the [Providence Daily Journal](#) recorded that the First of August celebration of 1846 was coordinated by the city's Union Anti-Slavery Society. That the festival of 1845 culminated in a concert at Mechanic's Hall suggests that the black community's laboring associations might have been involved in that year's processional organization, not to mention how the celebration sought to reach a broader racial audience. At various West Indian Emancipation festivals celebrated in the American North, black and white speakers gave addresses that commemorated the triumph of black emancipation and encouraged black activism. While black and white audiences could be politically moved by lectures and (as we shall see shortly) singing hymns, black Americans were especially energized as these addresses and songs called upon them to act as citizens to change the social and political direction of the American republic.

First of August addresses spoke to a variety of issues concerning the contemporary and future condition of blacks in the Atlantic world. From local speakers such as Newport's William Channing to national luminaries such as Ralph [Waldo](#)

23. William Pierson, *BLACK YANKEES: THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AFRO-AMERICAN SUBCULTURE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NEW ENGLAND* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 96-113, 117-128.



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[Emerson](#), John Quincy Adams, not to mention [Frederick Douglass](#) whose speech opened this section, black and white leaders recognized how these celebrations offered a stage to speak to the issues facing blacks in the Atlantic world. Not surprisingly these speeches move between the condition of blacks in the Caribbean to that of blacks in America, be they in the North or South. Indeed, that these speeches swivel freely between the Caribbean and the United States further illustrate how black hopes and struggles transcended national boundaries and confronted blacks throughout the black Atlantic. In this regard, it is perhaps best to initially examine the speech of Reverend Henry Bleby who served as a Baptist missionary to Barbados and witnessed the transition from [slavery](#) to freedom on the island. By 1858, when Bleby gave his August First speech at the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, the issue of American emancipation was at its most volatile (indeed John Brown would lead his historic raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia in less than a year) and undoubtedly influenced Bleby's address. Thus, Bleby's choice to initially highlight the Barbadian slave insurrection of 1832 (and the violence that ensued) and then stress the peaceful and successful transition from slavery to freedom connected with larger concerns that his abolitionist oriented audience (not to mention Americans in general) would have: what would be the future of slaves in the United States, especially once freed? Bleby directly pointed to the history of Barbadian slaves to illustrate how emancipation would not only be peaceful, but how the freedmen and women would nobly confront the challenges freedom presented. Indeed, the history of slavery in Barbados demonstrated that the brutality of slavery would only produce the violence of slave insurrections as the 1832 slave rebellion proved. In 1832, 50,000 slaves "made an effort for their liberty, and had resolved to strike a blow for freedom." According to Bleby, the uprising showed that slaves were discontented with their social condition (despite what West Indian Planters and other slaveholders argued), and that the violence endemic to [slavery](#) produced reciprocal violent responses. The British military put down the 1832 insurrection, which killed 2,000 insurgents and "most of them were either shot or hanged in cold blood."²⁴ Bleby said that after the slave uprising, planters discouraged missionary work (even though some missionaries publicly supported planter rule), and eighteen churches were burned. Despite this low point in Bleby's missionary experience, the abolition of slavery in the British Empire energized him, as he recognized that part of his mission was to play a role in the emancipation process. In fact, rather than producing mayhem and retribution, slaves welcomed abolition with joyful prayers and singing now that their jubilee had come. As Bleby said to his audience,

Sir, I was there when slavery was abolished. I saw the

24. Rev. Henry Bleby, "Speech of Rev. Henry Bleby, Missionary From Barbadoes, On the Results of Emancipation in the British W.I. Colonies, Delivered at the Celebration of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, held at Island Grove, Abington, July 31st, 1858" (Boston: R.F. Wallcut, 1858).



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monster died.... I stood up late at night, in one of the churches under siege under my charge, a very large church, and the aisles were crowded, and the gallery stairs, and the communion place, and the pulpit stairs, were all crowded, and there were thousands of people round the building, at every open door, and window, looking in.... I was my privilege to stand up in the congregation, and "proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison doors that were bound."²⁵

In Bleby's mind, God's children had finally been delivered from enslavement, describing how his black congregation knelt in prayer when "the hour of freedom had come." And at the crucial moment of their emancipation sang hymns to celebrate their jubilee. And not just singing, according to Bleby, "they literally shouted" the hymn, "The Negro Jubilee," which he then shared with the audience. Significantly the hymn did not simply rejoice the emancipation of slaves in the British Caribbean, although the stanza's did celebrate British justice and philanthropy for finally bringing slave's their freedom:

Send the glad tidings o'er the sea,
His chains are broke, the slave is free;
Britannia's justice, wealth, and might
Have gained the negro's long-lost right

Significantly, these freedmen and women recognized that this historical moment was connected to all those other black men and women still in chains in the black Atlantic. They also knew that the world would now turn their eyes on them to see how they would adjust to lives in freedom. As they sang:

Our prayers shall now with praise combine,
For freedom poured on every clime;
For holy freedom, gracious Lord,
To join a world in sweet accord:
Then, freed from sin, from error free,
We'll keep a brighter jubilee.²⁶

Bleby emphasized how emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies sparked a flame, and it was now incumbent upon his audience to carry the torch. As he said, "I hope the time will soon come, Mr. Chairman, when thousands of Christian ministers, with their congregations, throughout the length and breadth of the United States will be able to sing the Jubilee Hymn (to which he was received with "Loud Applause")."²⁷ In this statement,

25. Rev. Henry Bleby, "Speech of Rev. Henry Bleby, Missionary From Barbadoes, On the Results of Emancipation in the British W.I. Colonies, Delivered at the Celebration of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, held at Island Grove, Abington, July 31st, 1858."

26. Rev. Henry Bleby, "Speech of Rev. Henry Bleby, Missionary From Barbadoes, On the Results of Emancipation in the British W.I. Colonies, Delivered at the Celebration of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, held at Island Grove, Abington, July 31st, 1858."



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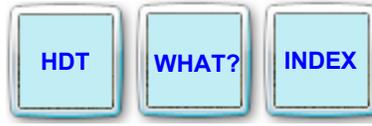
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Bleby concisely addressed the purpose of West Indian Emancipation festivals: for people to celebrate black freedom in the Atlantic world, and more importantly, become historical agents themselves to end [slavery](#) in the United States.

Bleby's address also pointed to the important ways freedmen and women made the transition from slavery to freedom. Emancipation was not a failure, as some people were arguing, rather "[t]hroughout the British West Indies, in every island, the condition of the people is comparably superior, in all respects to what it was in slavery." It was true that the colonies were not as prosperous as before slavery, but this was the result of changes in the Caribbean economy (sugar production) in general and not tied to slavery as a labor system. Freedom did not produce a lazy and indolent black population. Instead the "moral condition of Barbadoes will compare favorably with that of any other civilized country.... The people are willing to do all they can to raise themselves, and they do raise themselves." In fact, he turned his rhetorical microscope to the condition of free blacks in the United States. Describing how he read a playbill denoting that blacks must sit in a gallery, Bleby commented how that "alone was sufficient to satisfy me that [blacks in America] are laboring under discouragements, difficulties, and prejudices which must exercise a blighting influence upon them, and must necessarily keep them down." Bleby told his audience that laws of Barbados supported racial equality, such as sitting on juries. And even the governor of one of the British Caribbean islands emphasized racial equality by inviting black people to the governor's house. When "some of the gentry gave the cold shoulder to these colored guests, [the governor] caused it to be intimated to them, that if they expected invitations to the Government House, his guests must be treated by them with the same respect and courtesy he manifested towards them himself." To this statement, Bleby was received with loud cheers. Bleby stressed an issue that was just not influencing the lives of blacks hundreds of miles away in the American South (though that was the primary issue that brought the First of August participants together). He was now addressing an issue that directly affected his audience and was encouraging them to change the social and political condition of those black Americans who lived among them in New England. The gesture by the island governor "did more than anything else I know of to put an end to the reign of prejudice on that island. Very soon, the colored people began to mingle upon equal terms with the whites...."²⁸ If his white audience members would follow suit (and their presence at the First of August celebration was an encouraging sign) then too the United States could be a place where racial equality could manifest. Here again Bleby was

27. Rev. Henry Bleby, "Speech of Rev. Henry Bleby, Missionary From Barbadoes, On the Results of Emancipation in the British W.I. Colonies, Delivered at the Celebration of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, held at Island Grove, Abington, July 31st, 1858."

28. Rev. Henry Bleby, "Speech of Rev. Henry Bleby, Missionary From Barbadoes, On the Results of Emancipation in the British W.I. Colonies, Delivered at the Celebration of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, held at Island Grove, Abington, July 31st, 1858."



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emphasizing the larger issue that these Emancipation festivals addressed: the history—and future—of blacks in America were connected to other blacks in the Atlantic world. Collectively, they shared a history of [slavery](#) and racial prejudice, and together they would triumph over these challenges to become a truly free people, a virtuous example of Western Civilization enlightenment.

Indeed, the themes of collective history and identity as well as historical agency identity repeatedly emerge in West Indian Emancipation Celebration speeches. In one of the earlier addresses, Newport's William Ellery Channing implored his audience to transcend their parochial regional interests that had "deadened our sympathies for the oppressed," and collectively work to abolish slavery. Again, British West Indian Emancipation was an inspiring historical example of how moral virtue triumphed over the sin of slavery. Similar to Bleby's speech he described the brutality of the slave regime and how nature "cries aloud for Freedom as our proper good, our birthright and our end, and resents nothing so much as its loss." Like Bleby as well, he connected the issue of emancipation to racial equality. The triumph of black freedom in the British Caribbean was not just liberty from slavery: "Still more, and what deserves special note, the colored man raised his eyes, on this day, to the white man, and saw the infinite chasm between himself and the white race growing narrower; saw and felt that he to was a Man, that he too had rights; that he belonged to the common father, not to a frail, selfish creature; that under God he was his won master."²⁹ Other First of August speakers would draw upon the same theme. In his 1844 speech, Ralph [Waldo Emerson](#) noted, "I esteem the occasion of this jubilee to be the proud discovery, that the black race can contend with the white; that, in the great anthem which we call history ... [blacks in the Western world] perceive the time arrived when they can strike in with effect, and take a master's part in the music. The civility of the world has reached that pitch, that their moral genius is becoming indispensable, and the quality of this race honored for itself."³⁰

In his speech, William Channing informed his audience that emancipation in the British West Indies was more than a story of the end of [slavery](#) in the Caribbean. As he said, "[l]ittle did I imagine, that the emancipation of the Slaves, was to be invested with holiness and moral sublimity." Because of its moral and spiritual power, West Indian emancipation was commanding Americans to connect with this historic event in the Atlantic world and draw upon its energy to address the salient problems within their midst, especially racial prejudice. Channing noted that blacks were received as equals in Europe, and only in the United States were they viewed as inferior

29. William E. Channing, "An Address Delivered at Lennox, on The First of August, 1842. The Anniversary of Emancipation, In the British West Indies" (Lenox, MA: J.G. Stanly, 1842). Rider Collection, Box 98, No. 13. John Hay Library. Brown University.

30. Ralph [Waldo Emerson](#), "An Address Delivered to the Court-House in Concord, MA, on 1st August, 1844, On the Anniversary of the Emancipation of Negroes in the British West Indies" (Boston: James Munroe and CO, 1844).



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(exaggerated perhaps, but nonetheless a powerful rhetorical point to inspire his audience). As he said, "It is here [the United States] only this prejudice reigns; and to this prejudice strengthened by our subjection to the southern influence...."³¹ By celebrating West Indian Emancipation and its glory, Channing was demanding his audience not to let this historic moment recede into historical amnesia (perhaps like Haiti, the other great black emancipation movement that had been mostly shunned by the United States and, significantly, was celebrated publicly by black Americans like West Indian emancipation). In keeping the flames of history alive, his audience was sustaining the flames of human freedom alive as well. Speaking to his audience, Channing said, "We ought to shout for joy, not shrink like cowards, when justice and humanity triumph over established wrongs."³²

He thus wanted his audience to transform the moral soul of his country. In his speech he said,

We commemorate with transport the redemption of a nation from political bondage; but this is a light burden compared with personal slavery. The oppression which these United States threw off by our revolutionary struggle, was the perfection of freedom, when placed by the side of the galling, crushing, intolerable yoke which bowed the African to the dust. Thank God it is broken. Thank God, our most injured brethren have risen to the rank of men. Thank God, Eight Hundred Thousand human beings have been made free."³³

The connection surely was not lost on Channing's audience. The American Revolution began a new history in human freedom, and the slaves of the British West Indies picked up the torch of freedom, and it was now incumbent upon Americans "transport the redemption" of their "nation from political bondage." The festivities of the day, though, were sobered by one thought: "Our own country is in part the land of [slavery](#); and slavery becomes more hideous here than any where else, by its contrast with our free institutions. It is deformity married to beauty.... No other evil in our country, but this, should alarm us."³⁴

Hymn singing was a critical component to the First of August celebrations. They were integrated into the festivities, forming the crucial space where participants became a political and spiritual community. With the public addresses audiences listened to speeches given by notables who honored British West Indian emancipation and provoked them to become politically and

31. William E. Channing, "An Address Delivered at Lennox, on The First of August, 1842. The Anniversary of Emancipation, In the British West Indies"

32. William E. Channing, "An Address Delivered at Lennox, on The First of August, 1842. The Anniversary of Emancipation, In the British West Indies"

33. William E. Channing, "An Address Delivered at Lennox, on The First of August, 1842. The Anniversary of Emancipation, In the British West Indies"

34. William E. Channing, "An Address Delivered at Lennox, on The First of August, 1842. The Anniversary of Emancipation, In the British West Indies"



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socially involved in contemporary issues surrounding racial equality and [slavery](#). However, the singing of hymns fostered a deeper meaning of those issues as the act of singing together as a collective group connected them physically, emotionally, as well as spiritually to the causes for which they were going to advocate. Hymn singing became the sacred space where festival participants absorbed the political magnitude of emancipation and the condition of blacks in the Atlantic world as a spiritual exercise. As Henry Bleby's description of blacks in Barbados singing the "Negro Jubilee" on the night of their emancipation illustrates, singing hymns energized the congregation as they celebrated their freedom. However, it gave their struggle and their liberty spiritual meaning in the larger context of their collective experience, binding them to a collective memory, history, and identity. Emancipation would be the foundation of their new history, defining how they remembered the past, and shaping the way they would confront the future now bound together as a free people who would endure the forthcoming challenges together. Hymn singing produced a similar experience for First of August celebrants.

As the hymns and songs of the West Indian Emancipation celebrations reveal, these festivals were politicized rituals that energized and empowered participants. While we do not have records of hymns sung at [Rhode Island](#) festivals, available hymn sheets from other New England August First celebrations such as the one that occurred in 1855 in Abington, Massachusetts and sponsored by the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society describe the ways the singing of Jubilee hymns politicized the audience. This hymn sheet also demonstrates how participants connected the triumph of British Caribbean emancipation with the current struggle over American slavery. Between 1848 and 1861, slavery emerged as the defining feature of American national politics. Advocates for American abolitionism watched as the acquisition of territories from the Mexican-American War created sectional tensions, especially as the California Compromise of 1850 potentially allowed slavery into the New Mexico territories and codified a national Fugitive Slave Law. The constitutionality of the latter was tested and eventually confirmed with the Dred Scott Case in 1857. The Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 provoked further sectional crisis by allowing potential states north of Missouri to locally determine whether they would practice slavery in these new states, an action that nullified the Missouri Compromise of 1820. From the perspective of abolitionists, it would seem that their cause was being undermined by proslavery forces who seemed to control the levers of national politics. As the following hymn illustrates, however, the political anxieties produced by these national events only emboldened abolitionists, creating momentum to advance black emancipation. As the speeches delivered in the 1850s by notables such as [Frederick Douglass](#) and Henry Bleby demonstrate, West Indian Emancipation festivals, now more than ever, were moments to remember the triumph of previous struggles



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for emancipation and to continue that struggle in America. The following hymn produced by the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society reinforced this sentiment, particularly the powerful message of promoting the cause of black liberty in America. As the first and second stanzas described, the hymn began with the celebration of British emancipation, then shifted to the current crisis in the United States:

I.

'T is many years since England's arm
The mighty barriers rent,
And freely from his prison-house
The slave rejoicing went.

II.

To-day, beneath the "stars and stripes,"
The slave bows to his doom,
And a proud nation wreathed in chains,
Is rushing to its tomb!
It will not heed the boding signs,
That mark the tempest nigh;
It will not see the reddening bolts,
That flame along the sky!³⁵

Although it had been years since England had ended [slavery](#), it had followed the momentum of history, one that now celebrated human freedom. Contrastingly, the United States was moving against the tide of history, and "rushing to its tomb." As readers, we not only see the ways the hymn defined a teleology of history that reified a progressive narrative of freedom, but we also see an apocalyptic vision for those societies that continued to practice slavery. These slave societies were not heeding "the boding signs, that mark the tempest nigh," and were not recognizing the "reddening bolts, That flame along the sky." Like a description from the Biblical book of Revelations, the signs of Armageddon were evident in the skies. An apocalypse had arrived and the history of American slavery had now come to a turning point. Despite its virtues, the United States was a "proud nation wreathed in chains" and was now heading towards its death.

As the following stanzas illustrate, however, this hymn connected the broader themes of history to actual historical events confronting the celebration's participants:

III.

35. "Hymns and Songs For The Celebration of the First of August, 1855 At the Grove in Abington By the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society."



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

To-day, by sunny mount and glade,
The chapel bells do ring,
And in the palm-tree's grateful shade,
Their free-born children sing;
And answering from our own bright land,
Peals from a thousand marts,
That piercing cry of woe which comes
From breaking human hearts.

IV.

To-day, above old Pilgrim graves,
The Slaver counts his gain;
The Merchant for the fetter raves;
The Pulpits forge the chains;
And o'er Nebraska's glorious land,
O'er Kansas fertile plain,
Dark Slavery rides, and Death and Hell
Are following with their train.³⁶

Again, the hymn juxtaposes the conditions in the British Caribbean with that of the United States. In "the palm-tree's grateful shade, Their free-born children sing" where in America, the "piercing cry of woe which comes From breaking human hearts." The hymn then refers to how slavers profited from human bondage in a land founded by Pilgrims who fled to America seeking liberty. The hymn points to the irony that America was founded on the principles of liberty and yet keeps people enslaved, further supported by merchants and the "Pulpit." Contemporary events in Kansas and Nebraska only seemed to have strengthened the forces of [slavery](#), as "Dark Slavery rides and Death and Hell are following in their train" in these territories. The joy with which this hymn opened in celebrating British West Indian emancipation has become much more somber by the end of the song. Yet, the festival's participants did not leave the celebration on this solemn note. The following song from the hymn sheet followed the earlier hymn, that no doubt energized those singing, but also gave them a place in the historical saga to challenge their political situation that appeared to encourage the supporters of slavery. As the next song on the hymn sheet reads:

I.

Yes, boldly battle for the right,
Where'er thy lot is cast –
Wage ceaseless war 'gainst lawless might,

36. "Hymns and Songs For The Celebration of the First of August, 1855 At the Grove in Abington By the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society."



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

Nor think the conflict past;
Dream not, but work—be bold and brave—
Gird on Truth's armor strong:--
Oh! Never bow a willing slave
To sordid thrones of wrong.³⁷

This hymn demands singers to be active agents in history, to "battle for right" against "lawless might." History and truth were on their side, where "thy lot is cast," and thus they should embrace the militancy their struggle required. The 1850s were a troubling period for African Americans in the United States, especially since the Fugitive Slave Law could ensnare free blacks, sending them South and enslaving them. It seemed even free blacks in the North were not safe. Many considered leaving the country, either to the Caribbean, Latin America, or Canada, with some black leaders leading their own colonization plans (separate from the American Colonization Society) to immigrate to Africa. Hymns such as this one tried to embolden blacks and their supporters not to give up on the fight for black freedom. Rather than passively accepting the current social and political climate, this hymn (and the First of August celebrations in general) asked them to change the course of history and direct their political energy towards ending slavery.

As was noted, blacks in [Rhode Island](#) (and the American North in general) did not celebrate or honor emancipation in the northern United States. Perhaps this was due to the sporadic, disconnected, and drawn-out nature of northern emancipation. There was no day or year of jubilee northern blacks could celebrate. However, celebrating British West Indian Emancipation connected them to a larger narrative of profound meaning that recognized the collective experience of enslavement in the Atlantic world, promoting a collective memory and history, and encouraging them to act collectively to change the status of blacks throughout the black Atlantic. Although the collective history of [slavery](#) in the American North might have fostered a collective history, it was not remembered as a collective traumatic event to forge a collective identity. Instead it was the energy promoted by the need for historical agency to change their marginalized condition, as well as the sense of historical destiny that bound blacks in the American North. As the hymnals from the First of August celebrations reveal, these festivals encouraged this collective identity and connected them with the larger black Atlantic. British West Indian emancipation festivals may have been an "invented tradition" in the American North in the mid-nineteenth century, and would only last a couple of decades. However, they became a tradition that profoundly ritualized and historicized recent events to attach meaning to the modern condition of black

37. "Hymns and Songs For The Celebration of the First of August, 1855 At the Grove in Abington By the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society."



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

freedom in the black Atlantic.³⁸

Celebrating West Indian Emancipation throughout the Atlantic World thus served as profound moments of collective history and memory for blacks in the United States, Canada, and the British Caribbean. It simultaneously connected a glorious past where slaves surmounted challenges and became upstanding citizens in the process, and used this historical moment to demand similar historical change in the United States. However, West Indian Emancipation festivals would also have negative consequences. Undoubtedly, British West Indian emancipation celebrations were safe spaces to celebrate black Atlantic freedom in the Atlantic world because whites could participate without guilt, and thus allow the historical memory of [slavery](#) in [Rhode Island](#) and Nova Scotia to further recede in the past.

Historians such as Joanne Pope Melish and John Wood Sweet have described how the history of slavery in New England evaporated during the sectional crisis of the nineteenth century as New England historians and antiquarians practically extinguished local slavery from the record by describing it as “mild” or ignored it altogether.³⁹ By the end of the century a historical amnesia set in that virtually denied the existence of slavery in these areas and created a history that had embraced abolitionism, with the American North now having emerged victorious from the Civil War. For all their virtues in promoting a black Atlantic identity and collective history, British West Indian Emancipation festivals in New England reinforced this historical amnesia as they directly ignored the history of black men and women who had struggled to fight slavery in these areas at the turn of the nineteenth century. In as much as blacks contributed to the nineteenth century language and ideology of race in the region as some scholars have argued,⁴⁰ one wonders if August First festivals also reinforced the historical amnesia that denied the magnitude of slavery in New England.

RACE POLITICS

38. Marita Sturken, *TANGLED MEMORIES: THE VIETNAM WAR, THE AIDS EPIDEMIC, AND THE POLITICS OF REMEMBERING* (Berkeley CA: U of California P, 1997), 3-9, 12-17; Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, ed., *THE INVENTION OF TRADITION* (Cambridge MA: Cambridge UP, 1983, 2004), 3-14.

39. Joanne Pope Melish, *DISOWNING SLAVERY: GRADUAL EMANCIPATION AND “RACE” IN NEW ENGLAND, 1780-1860* (Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 1998), xiii, 208; John Wood Sweet, *BODIES POLITIC*, 2-11.

40. Joanne Pope Melish, *DISOWNING SLAVERY: GRADUAL EMANCIPATION AND “RACE” IN NEW ENGLAND, 1780-1860* (Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 1998), 4, 198.



WILLIAM J. BROWN

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December 27, Monday: Franz Liszt played his first concert in Berlin, before King Friedrich Wilhelm IV. It was here where “Lisztomania” first occurred (a word coined by [Heinrich Heine](#)). He was so successful that he would remain in Berlin for ten weeks playing 21 concerts. Liszt would receive the Ordre pour le Mérite from the King and be elected to the Prussian Academy of Fine Arts.

In protest of the racist Dorr constitution, [Frederick Douglass](#) spoke on this day and the following one at the Regional Anti-Slavery Convention in [Providence, Rhode Island](#).



It seems unlikely that during this visit [William J. Brown](#) met Douglass, since if he had he surely would have mentioned it.

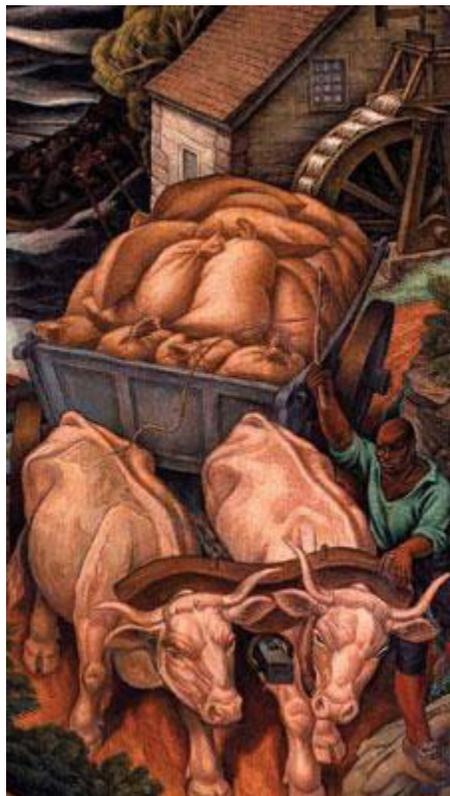


WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

1842

A minister in [Pawtucket, Rhode Island](#) put out a 36-page, illustrated publication entitled A BRIEF MEMOIR OF THE LIFE AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF [CATO PEARCE](#), A MAN OF COLOR: TAKEN VERBATIM FROM HIS LIPS AND PUBLISHED FOR HIS BENEFIT.



1844

January: Since the [Dexter Asylum](#) was incapable of offering any treatment to its insane inmates more sophisticated than simple confinement, and since it was only available to the problem people of [Providence](#) rather than available to the entire state, the state of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations chartered the establishment of a “Rhode Island Asylum for the Insane.” The Committee of Incorporators for this new mental hospital appealed to Cyrus Butler, who was in all likelihood the richest man in New England, for assistance in their efforts, and received a conditional pledge of \$40,000. To obtain this money, they would have to gather a matching amount from other members of the [Rhode Island](#) community. The committee would raise an additional \$54,000 by their efforts and the name of the hospital would be changed to “[Butler Hospital](#) for the Insane.”

PSYCHOLOGY

This American community had been taking steps to limit the influence of alcohol on its public life since April 1827, when the 1st public meeting on the subject of temperance had been organized at the 1st Baptist Church. A “City Temperance Society” had been formed on November 1, 1836, a “Providence Washington Total Abstinence Society” on July 8, 1841, a “Young Men’s Washington Total Abstinence Society” on July 9, 1841, a “Sixth Ward Washington Total Abstinence Society” on April 8, 1842, and a “Marine Washington Total



Abstinence Society” on August 29, 1842. The aggregate number of white citizens making pledges of total abstinence from [alcohol](#) in such societies by 1843 had risen to more than 5,000. At this point [William J. Brown](#) and his friends organized a new type of [temperance society](#)—one that would accept persons of color as members— calling their creation the “Young Men’s Union Friendly Association.”

RACE POLITICS



PAGES 122, 127-131: Among the varied causes which came up for consideration, and in which the colored people became interested



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was the temperance cause. Meetings were held and a temperance society was formed ... which was called the Young Men's Union Friendly Association. It continued to grow and become very prosperous. I became a very active member in it being called upon to fill many prominent offices, and although all our members were married men, they still kept up the organization, proposing to get incorporated. I wrote the petition ... and gave it to Mr. Wingate Hayes to carry into the general assembly, and was noticed in the papers. The society expressed great surprise at our next meeting to find that our petition had gone into the general assembly, and at the next meeting I had the pleasure of informing them that our charter was granted. It was the first charter ever granted to a colored society of Rhode Island. The society were proud that they had made such an advancement, and proposed having a banner and paying a visit to some place where we could show ourselves. Some of our members went to a man on Westminster street who did that kind of painting, and asked what he would charge to paint a banner for our society. He inquired about the society, and was told that we had just been chartered. He wanted to see our constitution. We let him see it, and after examining our charter he said that he would get us up a banner for fifteen dollars, but did not wish to have it known as he would paint one for any one for less than fifty dollars. He got us up one with a house and a weeping willow on one side, over which was a star and the letters Y.M.U.F. Society, instituted 1828, and on the other side was a white and colored man joined hands with a flag staff between them, bearing the American flag and encircled by a wreath, having at the bottom the word Union, and above the wreath in a semi-circle form were the words Young Men's Union Friend Society, incorporated January, 1844.

Our uniform was black caps, with glazed tops. On the left breast was a gilt star with a blue ribbon attached, and cream colored patent leather belts with a brass clasp in front, and white pants, dress coats, and white gloves. They made a contract with Mr. Comstock, master of transportation, to carry us at half price. On the morning of the first we started with a large company. It was quite foggy, and rained hard before we reached New Bedford. They had postponed the celebration until the next day. The committee were in waiting for us at the depot, as the rain had ceased, and escorted us up, our banner being covered. The day was clear and bright, and at half-past nine we marched to the place where the line was to be formed. The procession moved at ten a.m., having a cavalcade of one hundred mounted men in front, followed by the Anti-Slavery societies, then our society, making a fine appearance. We marched to the Town Hall, escorted in and welcomed by the citizens. After being addressed by some of the officials the line was again formed and made a parade through some of the principal streets. We then repaired to the grove. A stage was prepared for the speakers and music. The society appointed me as the orator... The next morning we went home well pleased with our visit. After we got our charter, the Young Men's Friendly Assistant Society, and the Seaman's



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Friend Society, applied for an act of incorporation and received charters. We then had three incorporated Societies in our city, besides The Mutual Relief, The Young Men's Morning Star, The Temperance Society and the Anti-Slavery Societies, making in all seven active societies, ready to unite on any occasion requiring their services. They were called out every year on the first of August, as we generally had a grand demonstration on that day, with a procession which paraded the principal streets of the city, and retired to a grove and spent the day in speaking and partaking of refreshments.

1846

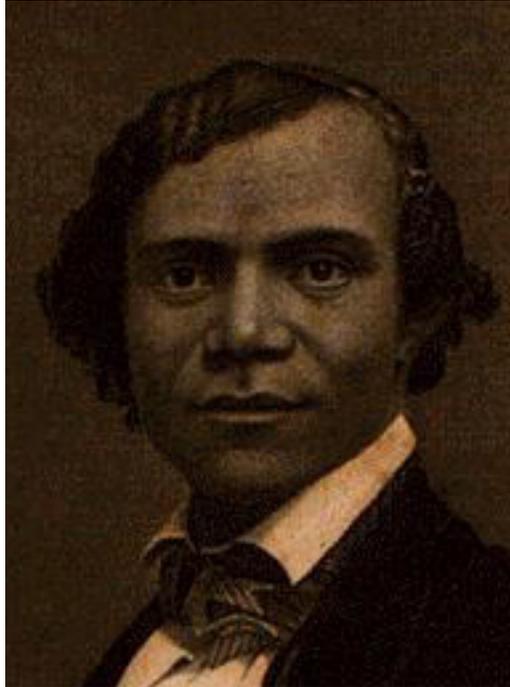
The Reverend [Leonard Withington](#), having for 8 years been off the board of the [Dummer Academy](#) (established by bequest of acting governor William Dummer in 1761, this Newbury institution has come to prefer to be referred to as [The Governor's Academy](#)), returned for another term. During most of his tenure this time, which would end in 1850, he would be serving as President.

[Boston](#)'s citizens again petitioned those in authority over them to bring to an end the racial segregation of their public schools. [William Cooper Nell](#) signed a petition, signed also by William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Francis Jackson (1789-1861), and Williams, asking the city of Boston to grant equal school rights to children of color. The School Board responded to this concern, to the effect that the racial discrimination which they saw fit to practice was a racial discrimination which was ordained of God and a racial discrimination which was "founded deep in the physical, mental, and moral nature of the two races." What the protesting blacks needed was not indignation against their betters but cultivation of "a respect for themselves." The committee voted 55 to 12 to continue the existing segregation of school facilities. Looking for someone more appropriate to the teaching of the black children at Boston's [Smith School](#) than the white man Abner Forbes, who was known to have been beating them,⁴¹ Horace Mann, Sr. first offered Forbes's position to the Reverend Samuel Joseph May and then to Ambrose Wellington.⁴² The inheritor of this post would need to be a white male it goes without saying, but would need to disbelieve in corporal punishment, and would need to be able to accept and honor the intellectual capabilities of black children. So, here's an interesting question, don't you suppose? Why did not Superintendent Mann consider offering that post to [Henry Thoreau](#) of Concord?

41. It will help us be more considerate of master Forbes, if we bear in mind that among white men he was being considered a disgrace, because he was teaching students of color. We have the following from the autobiography of [William J. Brown](#), a [Rhode Islander](#) of color: "[I]t was considered such a disgrace for white men to teach colored schools that they would be greatly offended if the colored children bowed or spoke to them on the street. Mr. Anthony, who was at one time teaching the colored school [in Providence], became very angry because Zebedee Howland met him on the street, spoke to him, raised his hat and bowed. He took no notice of his dark complexioned scholar, but the next Monday morning took poor Zebedee and the whole school to task, saying, 'When you meet me on the street, don't look towards me, or speak to me; if you do, I will flog you the first chance I get.'"

42. Horace Mann, Sr., a stuffed shirt advocate of citizen indoctrination who is given a lot of credit in stuffed shirt histories of education, had just, in his 10th annual report to the Massachusetts Board of Education, suggested hiring mostly females as teachers — since God had implanted in the maternal breast a "powerful, all-mastering instinct of love" that would make it possible for male superiors to induce them to work cheap and, nevertheless, do the right thing. Well, that's not exactly what he **said** — it's merely what he was understood to mean by those who knew how to read the code in use at the time. He might equally well have pointed out that women have smaller heads and smaller brains, had his audience been a different audience, and conveyed precisely the same message.

Fall/Winter: [Henry Bibb](#) would spend the fall and winter of this year in New England, lecturing against slavery:



And there I found a kind reception wherever I traveled among the friends of freedom.

Presumably it was during this period that Bibb ventured into [Rhode Island](#) and met [William J. Brown](#):



[Henry Bibb](#), from Tennessee [Kentucky, actually], came in. He had taken an excursion from home and had never seen fit to go back again [well, actually, he had gone back, but then escaped again]. He saw the Free Soil ticket spread out, which gentlemen of that party left for distribution. Mr. Bibb was nearly white, and knew well what slavery was. Taking up a Liberty ticket he said, "I hope the colored people will sustain this ticket." Several of our people being present and knowing that that ticket was nothing more than Democratic bait to draw off the colored voters, came down with vengeance on the tickets, much to the great surprise of Bibb.

FREE SOIL PARTY
LIBERTY PARTY

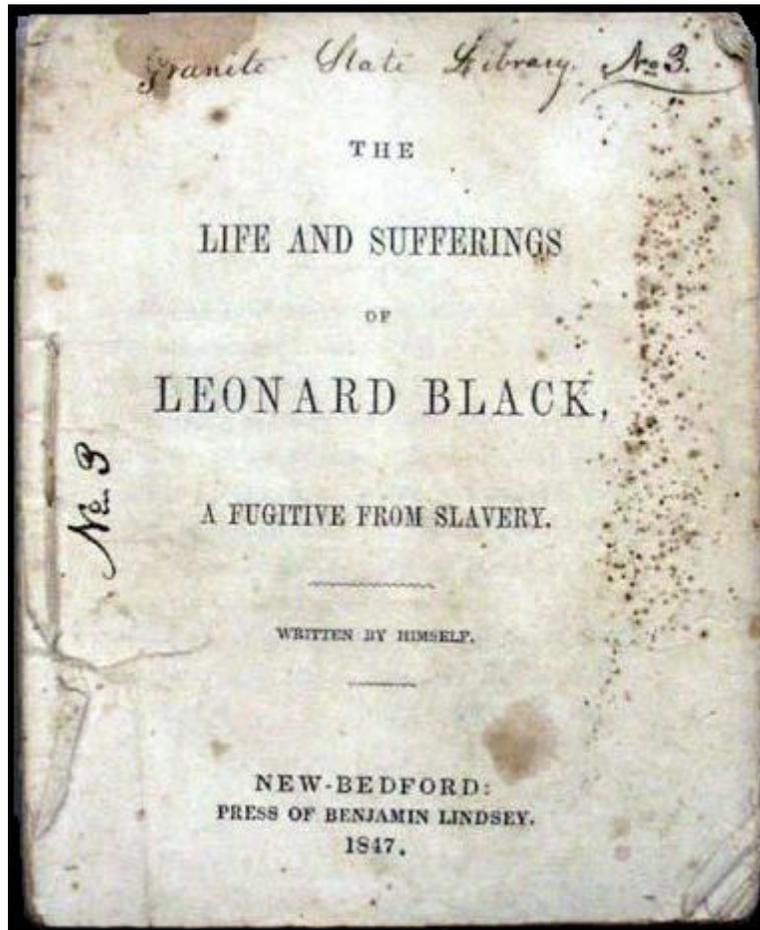


WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

1847

Leonard Black's *THE LIFE AND SUFFERINGS OF LEONARD BLACK, A FUGITIVE FROM SLAVERY* was issued by Benjamin Lindsey on Nantucket and in New Bedford, as printed in [Providence, Rhode Island](#).⁴³



During this year, in [Providence](#), [William J. Brown](#) fell ill.

(Do you suppose that this autobiography printed for Black in Providence in 1847 would serve as any sort of model for Brown's autobiography published in Providence in 1883?)

43. The book was for Black to sell to obtain funds for additional ministerial training. He told of his birth in Anne Arundel County, [Maryland](#) and related childhood experiences as a slave in [Baltimore](#), especially emphasizing mistreatment while "owned like a cow or horse" by a series of slavemasters. He had escaped, married, and become a pastor in Portland and in Boston, as well as being an itinerant preacher.



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

1848

November 7, Tuesday: Presidential election day. The candidates were the Whig Zachary Taylor, the Democrat [Lewis Cass](#), and the Free Soil Party candidate Martin Van Buren. Until this point the Whigs had been the expectable victors in Massachusetts elections. However, dramatic “Free-Soil” gains over the Whigs in this election marked the beginning of a long period of political instability. From this point until December 1853, when the tenuous aggregation of the Free-Soilers, [Know-Nothings](#), temperance one-issue people, and Irish Catholics with the Democratic Party would begin to unravel, this uneasy coalition would have to hope for divisions within the Whig Party in order to achieve any victory at the Massachusetts polls.

This defeat marked the end of Martin Van Buren’s political career.

After the election of a Whig as president, Zachary Taylor, the friends of [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), such as [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#) and James Russell Lowell, took up a subscription for his support.

[William J. Brown](#) of [Providence, Rhode Island](#) would recollect a tactful speech he made (we will forgive him if what he would report later is perhaps more like the speech he could have made, would have made, should have made, than like the speech he actually did make, as such is a common failing among aged recollectors), as follows:



PAGES 94-95: The Law and Order party broke up, the colored voters went over to the Whig party, the most of the Law and Order party being Whigs, still claiming our support. Their candidate for President was a slaveholder, Zachary Taylor. We did not like the idea of voting for a slaveholder, and called a meeting on South Main Street to see what we should do. I opposed the meeting being held in that part of the city, fearing it would prove injurious to my interest. I was in that part of the city working at shoe making, my custom was good, and I knew that if I attended that meeting and spoke in favor of the Whig candidate, I should lose their custom and perhaps get hurt. I could not speak in favor of the Democratic candidate for I was opposed to that party. I was obliged to attend the meeting in the third ward. I was at my wit’s ends to know what to do. I attended the meeting and found the place packed with people, and about one hundred and fifty people filled out to the hall door. The meeting was opened when I arrived, Mr. Thomas Howland presiding as chairman. I went in and took the farthest corner of the room. George C. Willis was called, and took his position in front of the stage; addressing the chairman, he remarked, that we were in a very curious position; we must be decided in favor of one party or the other, and his opinion was of the two evils, we must choose the least; and his choice was in favor of Zachary Taylor, the Whig candidate. Several others spoke, and in harsh terms denounced the Democratic party. I was then called, and tried to decline, but the call came from every one, Brown, Brown. I was compelled to speak. I arose, addressed the president, and told the audience we were called together to settle a very grave



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question, which as citizens, it was our duty to decide which of the two parties we were to support. We were not to decide upon the man, but the party. If we were to decide on the candidate, it would be not to cast a vote for Taylor, for he is a slaveholder; and this I presume is the feeling of every colored voter, but we are identified with the Whig party, and it is the duty of every colored person to cast his vote for the Whig party, shutting his eyes against the candidate; as he is nothing more than a servant for the party; but I wish it understood that I am not opposed to either party as such; because I believe there are good and bad men in both parties. I have warm friends in the Democratic party, which I highly esteem, and who would take pleasure at any time in doing me a favor. Some of them are my best customers; but in speaking of the party, those men know well the duty demanded of them by their party, and would not neglect it for the sake of accommodating me. I blame no man for carrying out the principles of his party. He has a perfect right to do so, for this is a free country, and we all have a right alike to enjoy our own opinion; there being two parties we are stirred up to action. It makes lively times, and I hope the times will continue to be lively, and our meetings to increase in number, for the more we have, and the larger the attendance upon them, the more my business will increase, for the more shoes that are worn out in attending these meetings, the more custom I shall have. I sat down amid loud cheering. It was a bitter pill for us to vote for a man who was a slaveholder; but placing him in the light of a servant for the party, and we identified with that party, we managed to swallow it down whole. After voting to sustain Zachary Taylor as a candidate for the next Presidential election, we closed the meeting.

1850

November: In [Providence](#), Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Charles Calistus Burleigh, and Charles Lenox Remond addressed the annual meeting of the [Rhode Island](#) Anti-Slavery Society. This would be the first of Sojourner's antislavery speeches that has been documented.

I think it likely that it would have been at this point that [William J. Brown](#) met Frederick Douglass:



PAGES 93-94: When Frederick Douglass paid us a visit, I met him in company with several brethren, and he was introduced as a Methodist preacher. He said he had heard we were brought up on election day on crackers and cheese. He received his information from an Abolitionist in the Democratic party. It came about in this way: When the colored people were first called upon to vote to see whether the people wanted a constitution or not, the Suffrage party threatened to mob any colored person daring to vote that day. We proposed to meet at the old artillery gun house



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the day before. We had a meeting that evening and thought it best to get the people together and keep them over night, so they would be ready for the polls in the morning. In order to keep them we must have something to eat, for if the Democrats got hold of them we could not get them to vote, for they would get them filled up with rum so that we could not do a thing with them; so in order to secure them we had to hunt them up, bring them to the armory, and keep men there to entertain them. I met with them in the afternoon and found men of all sorts, from all parts of the city, and all associating together. They had coffee, crackers, cheese and shaved beef. During the time a lot of muskets were brought in, and put in a rack. It is said they were brought in to use in case of disturbance, some said good enough, let them come. They scraped the hollow and every place, getting all the men they could find; then coffee, crackers and cheese were plenty, and no one disturbed them. When the polls were opened, those in the first ward went to vote in a body, headed by two powerful men. They voted in the Benefit Street school house; the officers went ahead to open the way. They all voted and then went home, that ended the crackers and cheese. Mr. Bibb tried hard to get the colored voters to vote the Liberty ticket. We made him understand it was not all gold that glitters. He left our quarters and went about his business, and the Law and Order party elected their candidates. I received six dollars for my work. Mr. Bowen employed me after election to go around and see if there were strangers that had been here long enough to vote, and see that their names were registered, and at the next election he would pay me. I collected quite a number who had never taken the trouble to register their names.

1853

In [Rhode Island](#), F.M. Dimond was the Acting Governor.

Grist Mill activity began to fill the pages of the daybooks for the Machine Shop business at [Saylesville](#). There had been a shift away from general job shop work toward the making of wooden boxes.



WILLIAM J. BROWN

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1855

The [Providence, Warren, and Bristol](#) railroad link began to provide mass transportation for the East Bay region of [Rhode Island](#). If the locomotive used for this service was a new one, it may have looked like this, for this was “A good Standard Type” built by Danforth Cooke & Company in 1855:

[William J. Brown](#) would report a beginning of a decline, in the [Baptist](#) church for people of color on College Hill in [Providence, Rhode Island](#), due to their having lost their minister:

PAGES 121-124: Our church had been in a very low state. It commenced to decrease in 1855, directly after our pastor, Rev. Chauncey Leonard, left us. He had been with us some two years, when he united with us. He had come directly from a theological institution. His education was good, and his oratory surpassed any pastor that ever graced our pulpit since the organization of our church. He was receiving from us four hundred dollars a year, which was all we were able to give, and a portion of that came from the Rhode Island State Convention. But our pastor was greatly in debt for his education, and if he did not go as a missionary to Liberia, he must repay them. As soon as they learned that he had settled over our church, they demanded their pay, and this brought him into such straitened circumstances that he could not remain here and support his family; and having an offer from the people in Baltimore, Md., to take charge of a select school, and supply a church, with a salary of six hundred dollars, he tendered his resignation to our church and accepted the call to Baltimore. That left us without any pastor, and the church fell into a despondent state.... Brother Waterman remarked that we had better disband, as we were all paupers, our pastor had gone and we could not do anything. But the majority proposed to continue together and trust in the Lord.

(During this period of his church’s vulnerability, Brown would be serving proudly as a lay minister or exhorter.)



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

1856

August 1, Friday: From the [Rhode Island](#) diary of John Hamlin Cady (1838-1914): “Darkey celebration.”

1859

It was reported in the [Boston Courier](#) that the custom of segregated pews, for black members to be seated separately from white members, was “in New England’s churches largely a memory.” The newspaper meant, of course, in its good-sounding story, New England’s **Protestant** churches — for no [Catholic](#) edifice in New England had ever permitted black attendance of any sort and thus no Catholic church in New England had ever had any occasion for such embarrassing segregation of its seating. Also, the paper failed to mention just how it was that the problem of segregated seating in the Protestant churches had been solved: largely, the issue was being defanged by taking the pressure off the white Protestant churches, by the creation of new Protestant churches that were de-facto 100% black. **Segregation, rather than being eliminated in the Protestant churches of America, was being totalized, just like it always had been in the Catholic churches of America.**

1874

In [Providence, Rhode Island](#), [William J. Brown](#) wrote the preface to his autobiography.

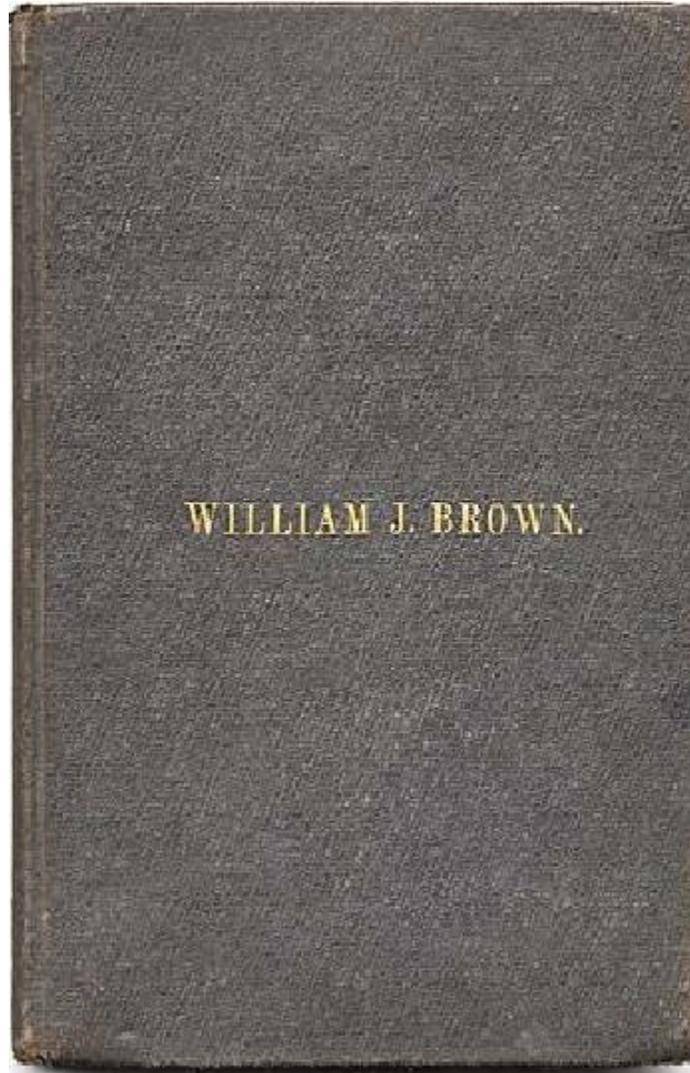


WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN

1883

Publication of the 1st edition of [William J. Brown](#)'s THE LIFE OF WILLIAM J. BROWN, OF PROVIDENCE, R.I.; WITH PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF INCIDENTS IN RHODE ISLAND, in [Providence, Rhode Island](#) by the firm of Angel & Co., Printers. ⁴⁴This 1st edition in its original cloth gilt binding as illustrated is now worth \$2,000 on the rare book market, despite "corners a little bumped and worn and a few modest stains to the rear board." (Fortunately, the autobiography has been reprinted twice, in 1971 and in 2006.)



Professor Joanne Pope Melish would comment, about this autobiography, that:
44. We have in Providence two life-story books which were published in order to create an income for a needy elderly man of color. One is an 1829 publication done for the benefit of [Robert Voorhis](#), and the other is this 1883 publication by and for [William J. Brown](#). Did that one at least in part inspire this one?



WILLIAM J. BROWN

WILLIAM J. BROWN



In depicting his own struggles and those of his ancestors and his community, Brown offers a vivid picture of a New England white society reluctantly disentangling itself from slavery, clinging to habits of mind formed in its context, and refashioning its basic arguments into a new form of bondage – the virulent racism that is slavery’s evil twin.... Brown’s memoir is important because it represents a determined effort by a nineteenth-century man of color to undermine the willful historical amnesia that fed, and feeds, New England racism.

(The above corresponds closely with my own personal take on the situation, since I have come to regard the antebellum Providence “quietist” [Quaker](#) context of this black American’s life as having been in effect the testing-ground for what would, subsequent to our Civil War, emerge as the disgrace of our nation’s “Jim Crow” period of racial separatism.)

1885

February 19, Thursday: [William J. Brown](#), who had been blind for some time, died of apoplexy in [Providence, Rhode Island](#). His funeral would be held at the Baptist Church on Congdon Street, after which his body would be buried in the North Burial Ground.



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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





WILLIAM J. BROWN

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Prepared: September 30, 2013



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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, upon someone's request we have pulled it out of the hat of a pirate that has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (depicted above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of data modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture. This is data mining. To respond to such a request for information, we merely push a



WILLIAM J. BROWN

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button.

Commonly, the first output of the program has obvious deficiencies and so we need to go back into the data modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and do a recompile of the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process which 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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