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Slavery, emancipation and Black freedom in Rhode Island, 1652-1842

Christy Mikel Clark-Pujara
University of Iowa

SLAVERY, EMANCIPATION AND BLACK FREEDOM IN RHODE ISLAND, 1652-1842

by

Christy Mikel Clark-Pujara

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in History
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

December 2009

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Leslie Schwalm

ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that, in Rhode Island, the institution of slavery, the process of emancipation and circumscribed black freedom was fundamentally influenced by the businesses of slavery. The businesses of slavery include the West Indian rum and slave trade, the Atlantic slave trade and the negro cloth industry. Specifically, I contend that in Rhode Island these businesses led to the legalization of race-based slavery, buttressed the local economy, and helped to maintain the institution of slavery throughout the Americas. Academic scholarship and public knowledge of northern slavery and emancipation in the United States remains relatively slim. American slavery has become almost synonymous with the American South, disregarding the fact that it was an institution that was socially accepted, legally sanctioned and widely practiced in the North. Furthermore, most emancipation studies focus on the Civil War era, rather than the decades of freedom struggles in the post-revolutionary North. This dissertation argues that the history of slavery and freedom in North American is fundamentally skewed without a full accounting of the northern experience. Historians have long noted the importance of the Atlantic slave trade and trade with the West Indies to the survival and maintenance of the northern North American British colonies. This project studies the origins of race-based slavery, the process of emancipation and circumscribed black freedom within the context of the development of the businesses of slavery.

Abstract Approved: _____
Thesis Supervisor

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Title and Department

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Date

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Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Christy Mikel Clark-Pujara

has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy
degree in History at the December 2009 graduation.

Thesis Committee: _____
Leslie Schwalm, Thesis Supervisor

_____
Mark Peterson

_____
Shelton Stromquist

_____
Kevin Mumford

_____
Lea Vandervelde

To my father and mother, Henry and Renee Clark, whose work ethic and sacrifices made this project possible, and in loving memory of my oldest sister Annette

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This dissertation argues that, in Rhode Island, the institution of slavery, the process of emancipation and circumscribed black freedom was fundamentally influenced by the businesses of slavery. The businesses of slavery include the West Indian rum and slave trade, the Atlantic slave trade and the negro cloth industry. Specifically, I contend that in Rhode Island these businesses led to the legalization of race-based slavery, buttressed the local economy, and helped to maintain the institution of slavery throughout the Americas. Academic scholarship and public knowledge of northern slavery and emancipation in the United States remains relatively slim. American slavery has become almost synonymous with the American South, disregarding the fact that it was an institution that was socially accepted, legally sanctioned and widely practiced in the North. Furthermore, most emancipation studies focus on the Civil War era, rather than the decades of freedom struggles in the post-revolutionary North. This dissertation argues that the history of slavery and freedom in North American is fundamentally skewed without a full accounting of the northern experience. Historians have long noted the importance of the Atlantic slave trade and trade with the West Indies to the survival and maintenance of the northern North American British colonies. This project studies the origins of race-based slavery, the process of emancipation and circumscribed black freedom within the context of the development of the businesses of slavery.

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INTRODUCTION

SLAVERY, EMANCIPATION AND BLACK FREEDOM IN RHODE ISLAND, 1652-1842

Academic scholarship and public knowledge of northern slavery and emancipation in the United States remains relatively slim. American slavery has become almost synonymous with the American South, disregarding the fact that it was an institution that was socially accepted, legally sanctioned and widely practiced in the North. Furthermore, most emancipation studies focus on the Civil War era, rather than the decades of freedom struggles in the post-revolutionary North. I contend that the history of slavery and freedom in North America is fundamentally skewed without a full accounting of the northern experience. Northern colonists and citizens played a major role in the development and maintenance of slave societies in the American South and the West Indies.[1] They did so through their involvement with the businesses of slavery. These businesses include the West Indian trade, the Atlantic slave trade and the negro cloth industry. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries northern colonists supplied West Indian planters with slaves, foodstuffs, building materials, household goods and clothing in exchange for cash and molasses. During the antebellum era northerners made the distinctive coarse wool clothing, as know as negro cloth, worn by southern slaves. Moreover, these businesses of slavery shaped the black experience in the North. White Rhode Islanders found and exploited a significant niche in the Atlantic economy yielding not only profits, but also transforming racial identities.[2]

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[1] In a slave society the economy revolved around the goods produced by slave labor and slaveholders dominated the political and social elite. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: the First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1998), 8.

[2] See Thelma Foote, *Black and White Manhattan: History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

The black experience in Rhode Island must be understood within the economic reality of the region. It mattered that the businesses of many white Rhode Islanders were predicated on the dehumanization of black people.[3] Historians have long noted the importance of the Atlantic slave trade and trade with the West Indies to the survival and maintenance of the northern North American British colonies.[4] However, no one has specifically studied the origins of race-based slavery, the process of emancipation and circumscribed black freedom within the context of the development of the businesses of slavery. This dissertation argues that, in Rhode Island, the institution of slavery, the

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[3] I use the term black or African American to refer to people of African descent including mixed raced people. I only use the term African when I am sure that the person or persons were born in Africa. I do this for two reasons. First of all it is almost impossible to know at any given moment in colonial period which slaves were born in Africa, the West Indies, during the middle passage, or in North America. Secondly, following the American Revolution, state officials in Rhode Island created a white/black binary in assigning a racial category to its populations. They classified mulattoes, mustees, American Indians, and negroes as black, which makes it nearly impossible to tease out the various racial identities in post colonial Rhode Island. In contrast, in colonial Rhode Island, "negro" referred to mixed heritage with African heritage predominating; "mulatto" referred to white and black mixture; "mustee" referred to American Indian and African mixture, and "Indian" referred to a predominately American Indian heritage. As members of the Rhode Island General Assembly attempted to strip mustees and American Indians of their land and rights, they created a separate monolithic "other" category—black. These "black" people had no claims to native ancestral lands. However, this practice of grouping all non-whites as black was largely confined to state records. For example, runaway slave advertisements and manumission records (from the colonial period through the turn of the nineteenth century) specifically identified the ethnicity of slaves and former slaves. In other words, slaveholders continued to acknowledge the ethnicity of their bonds-people. Slaveholders, unlike state officials, were not interested in creating a single group of "others." Instead they were interested in reclaiming or manumitting their property, which necessitated an accurate description which specified ethnicity and mixed raced heritage. See Joanne Pope Melish, "The Racial Vernacular: Contesting the Black/White Binary in Nineteenth-Century Rhode Island," in *Race, Nation, & Empire in American History*, ed. James T. Campbell, Matthew Pratt Guterl and Robert G. Lee (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2007).

[4] Rum, made from West Indian molasses, was a critical export for Northern colonies. As economic historian John McCusker argues, "the export of rum contributed significantly toward righting the balance of payments of the continental colonies. He uses an analysis of the contribution of each colony's trade toward meeting their English debts to determine rum's importance to each colony and colonists. John McCusker, "The rum trade and the balance of payments of the thirteen Continental Colonies, 1650-1775" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1970), 4-12.

process of emancipation and circumscribed black freedom was fundamentally influenced by the West Indian trade, the Atlantic slave trade and the negro cloth industry.[5] Specifically, I contend that in Rhode Island these businesses led to the legalization of race-based slavery, buttressed the local economy, and helped to maintain the institution of slavery throughout the Americas.

Rhode Island is the best northern colony and state to study, because its residents were heavily involved in the West Indian trade, they dominated the British North American trade in slaves, and were among the leading producers of negro cloth. Rum, which was distilled from West Indian molasses, was the most important and number one export in Rhode Island.[6] Over 60% of all the slave ships that disembarked from ports in British North America left from Rhode Island.[7] By 1850, 79% of all Rhode Island textile mills manufactured negro cloth.[8] Separately theses facts are intriguing; however, when considered together they demand investigation. Why was America's smallest

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[5] Like the articles in *Complicity* this dissertation argues that the North "promoted, prolonged and profited from slavery." However, instead of surveying how various states participated in this process this analysis focusing one place in particular—Rhode Island. Anne Farrow, Joel Lang and Jenifer Frank, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited From Slavery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), Bernard Bailyn, "Slavery and Population Growth in Colonial New England," in *Engines of Enterprise An Economic History of New England*, ed. Peter Temin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 253-259.

[6] See Paul Weiler, *Rhode Island---West Indies Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Masters Thesis, University of Iowa August, 1947), John McCusker, *The rum trade.*

[7] See Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1981).

[8] The Negro Cloth Industry was a small segment of the larger textile industry which was controlled by northerners. In fact, northerners controlled much of the cotton business in general. Only the banks in Manhattan and London were big enough to extend massive lines of credit to plantations owners who often bought seed, farming equipment and slaves on credit. The industry was heavily concentrated in New England; one third of all the cloth produced at the famed Lowell Mills, in Massachusetts, was worn by slaves on southern plantations. Myron O. Stachiw, " 'For the Sake of Commerce": Slavery, Antislavery, and Northern Industry," in *The Meaning of Slavery in the North*, ed. David Roediger and Martin H. Blatt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 33-36. Farrow, *Complicity*, 13.

colony and state so heavily involved in the businesses of slavery? But, more importantly, how did these businesses affect the origins and development of slavery, the emancipation process, and black freedom?

The emancipation process is central to this project because it sheds light on how the institution of slavery had developed during the colonial period and circumscribed black freedom following the Revolutionary War. The emancipation process, which began in 1770s and ended in 1842 was driven by the actions of enslaved people and Quakers. Like enslaved people throughout the North, enslaved Rhode Islanders took advantage of the chaos of the war to push back against the institution of slavery. They ran away in unprecedented numbers, volunteered for military service, pressed their masters for freedom and lobbied legislatures. Furthermore, several anti-slavery Rhode Island Quakers held key positions in the state legislature; they emancipated their own slaves but also successfully passed a gradual emancipation law. As a result, the actions of blacks and whites broke down of the institution of slavery in Rhode Island during the revolutionary period. However, for black Rhode Islanders, freedom would come in waves and was often accompanied by poverty and social marginalization. The state emancipated Revolutionary War soldiers in 1778, and the gradual emancipation law freed children born to slave mothers after 1784. Nevertheless, the state legislature did not abolish slavery until 1842. Therefore, many black Rhode Island families were a mix of free, indentured and enslaved people. Free blacks also encountered severe discrimination in local and state law. Moreover, they faced hostility from working class whites who view them as social degenerates and economic competitors. These hostilities culminated in destructive and deadly race riots. In response to these challenges, black Rhode Islanders formed their own institutions, including the nation's very first free black association.

Drawing on a wide range of sources, including manuscript collections, government documents, business correspondence and organizational records, I argue for wider understanding of how the business of slavery shaped racial ideologies and the lives

of black Rhode Islanders. My project adds to literature which argues that northern colonies and states were part of, not separate from, North American slavery. Rhode Island farmers, tradesmen, merchants and manufacturers were part of a much larger system. The Atlantic economy relied on the collective activities of northern colonies and states such as Rhode Island to provide slaves, food, clothing and goods to plantations societies in North America and the West Indies. Finally this project contributes to a more integrated national history of slavery, emancipation and black freedom by exposing the direct roles that northern colonies and states played in promoting and maintaining the institution of slavery from the colonial period throughout the antebellum era.

Chapters one, two and three rely heavily on the colonial records of the Rhode Island General Assembly. Through an analysis of slave law, chapter one argues that as white Rhode Islanders became increasing involved in the West Indian and Atlantic slave trades they accepted and supported the enslavement of American Indians and people of African descent.[9] Chapter two contends that white Rhode Islanders commitment to race-based slavery bolstered their intense economic investment in the businesses of slavery in the decades preceding the American Revolution. Chapter three argues that black Rhode Islanders were responsible for the breakdown of the day-to-day practices of slaveholding; furthermore, piecemeal emancipation in the revolutionary period led to a circumscribed black freedom. Using town council records and the meeting minutes of black benevolent societies, chapter four argues that black Rhode Islanders resisted circumscribed black freedom by defying poor laws, building independent black institutions and publicly challenging white supremacy. Through an examination of the business papers of the

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[9] Like historian Thelma Foote I invoke the arguments of Stuart Hall that "racialized subjects are formations that arise out of historically specific projects and strategic relations of power." While Foote applies this theory to the project of colony building I apply it project of economic stability. Thelma Foote, *Black and White Manhattan: History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7 and Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Domination," *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (1980).

Hazard's negro cloth mills, chapter five argues that decades after Rhode Islanders passed a gradual emancipation law they remained heavily invested in the institution of slavery through the production of negro cloth.

Northern Slavery

Slavery was an important and respectable business in the colonial North. Even those who could not afford to own slaves commonly hired out slave labor. African slaves first entered northern colonies in the 1650s and were concentrated in New York and the New Netherlands.[10] By 1700, forty percent of New York City residents held slaves, and in Pennsylvania one in three residents was a slave of African descent.[11] As the economy matured, slave labor was present in every facet. Slaves labored as carpenters, shipwrights, sail makers, printers, tailors, shoemakers, coopers, blacksmiths, bakers, weavers and goldsmiths.[12] Purchased for domestic, manual, trade, and agricultural labor, slaves were employed at a variety of tasks.[13] Most northern slaveholders held fewer than two slaves; however, slaveholding was widespread throughout the colonial North.

Throughout the colonial North, the status of slaves was ambiguous, especially during the Dutch occupation of what is now New York. Slavery was not a recognized institution in Holland; furthermore, the colony had not established any concrete laws

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[10] Carol Berkin, *First Generations: Women in Colonial America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 124.

[11] James and Lois Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Black, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 4-8.

[12] Northerners were dedicated to bound labor because it was essential to their diversified economy. See Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual emancipation and Race in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[13] Ira Berlin, *Many Thousand Gone: the First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 47-63.

concerning exactly what slavery was and who was eligible to be a slave.[14] Consequently, in Dutch New Amsterdam, most slaves lived under "half freedom," a compromise between slavery and indentured servitude. Enslaved people were often allowed to live and labor independently. They were also recognized as persons with rights however; they were still property who were bought and sold at will.[15] By the late 1640s, the Dutch had established New Amsterdam as the principal slave port in North America and within two decades had a clear preference for African slave labor. In 1644, according Governor Willem Kieft, "Negroes would accomplish more work for their masters at less expense, than farm servants, who must be bribed to go thither by a great deal of money and promises."[16]

English takeover of New York in 1664 further encouraged slaveholding. The Articles of Capitulation institutionalized current property and status relations in New Amsterdam.[17] The English crown allotted land grants according to the number of slaves New York colonists owned.[18] The English were also instrumental in attaching race to the institution of slavery. Colonial governments commonly passed laws which declared that only people of African descent were eligible for perpetual bondage.[19] Furthermore, as the black slave population grew so too did white fear of black insurrection in the

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[14] Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999), 10.

[15] Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 7.

[16] Ibid., 26.

[17] Ibid., 29-34.

[18] George Fishman, *The African American Struggle for Freedom and Equality: The Development of a People's Identity, New Jersey, 1624-1850* (New York: Garland, 1997), 28.

[19] Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 37.

aftermath of the 1712 slave rebellion; consequently, by 1712, colonial in New York suppressed all blacks regardless of their legal status.[20]

Before the turn of the eighteenth century many northern slaves held limited terms of service.[21] However, by 1700, most northern colonies had followed the lead of Massachusetts and established slave codes. Colonial law assigned slaves a status somewhere between legal personhood and chattel; they could own property, but they were property.[22] By the early eighteenth century every colony had special laws, procedures and punishments for people of African descent. Some restrictions included race-based curfews, provisions against travel and purchasing liquor, holding livestock and gathering in groups of four or more. Northern slaves were most often one of a few bound laborers in a household and had intimate interactions with whites. Furthermore, due to the ambivalence of some Quakers and Puritans, they had increased access to education. Northern slaves were also largely a urban population, except in Rhode Island where slaves were just as likely to reside on large farms.

Slaveholding remained relatively small in colonial New England, where most slaveholders held two or fewer slaves. In 1715, blacks accounted for just over two and one half percent of the total population, and by 1790, just over one and one half percent. However, the slave population was concentrated in several cities and counties, where they accounted for much higher proportions of the population. Not only was the black population grow, it was a population brought directly from Africa. By 1638, New Englanders were importing slaves from the British West Indies, and by 1644 directly from Africa. New Englanders, many of whom were involved in the Atlantic slave trade,

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[20] Foote, *Black and White Manhattan*, 10.

[21] Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 6.

[22] As argued by historian by historian Edgar McManus. Edgar McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 62.

used slaves as farmhands, domestic servants, sailors, assistants and artisans—making them even more prosperous. Unlike slaves in the southern colonies, New England slaves had right to life and a day in court; however, like their southern counterparts, they were bought, sold, willed and inventoried. Their behavior was also legislated. Slave codes attempted to prevent running away, theft, drunkenness, damage to public property, assaulting or defaming a white person, disturbing the peace, rioting and insurrection.[23] Slave codes varied from colony to colony, but were harshest in colonies like Rhode Island and New York where the proportion of slaves was highest.

Northern colonists not only owned slaves, but supported the development and maintenance of slave societies in the American South and the West Indies.[24] Northerners planned and financed Atlantic slave trading voyages; they brought slaves, food, lumber, household goods, tools and clothing to sugar, rice and cotton plantations. Northern merchants, tradesmen, farmers and industrialists supplied plantations with basic necessities which allowed slaveholders to devote their energies to slave management and stable crop production. These businesses of slavery shaped the North. Trade with plantation based societies was an essential component of the economic development and stability of the North. This was especially true in New England where trade dominated the economy, and nowhere was trade more important than in the tiny merchant society of Rhode Island. The New England economy was directly tied to slavery—particularly the Atlantic slave trade and the West Indian trade.

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[23] See Lorenzo Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

[24] See Peter Temin, ed. *Engines of Enterprise An Economic History of New England*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 253-259, John McCusker, *The rum trade*, John McCusker and Kenneth Morgan ed. *Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), John McCusker and Russell Menard, *Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1985).

Northern Emancipation and Black Freedom

Understanding the various processes of emancipation in the North is central to this project. How slaves were emancipated fundamentally shaped how both blacks and whites would understand black "freedom." The American Revolution transformed the institution of slavery in the North and ultimately led to its gradual destruction. The chaos of war and shortage of men to fight for the cause led to the practical breakdown of slavery in the North. Most northern states passed gradual emancipation laws which reflected the reality of the breakdown of the institution of slavery. Only two states, Vermont and Massachusetts, abolished slavery outright. Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York and New Jersey, passed gradual emancipation laws.[25] These laws stipulated that children born to slave mothers after a certain date were free, but indentured to their mother's master. Some states freed children when they reached their majority, while other states indentured freed people well into adulthood. Rhode Island was one of the first northern states to pass a gradual emancipation law in 1784, but among the last to abolish the institution in 1842. Gradual Emancipation also allowed white northerners to slowly wean themselves off of slaveholding, both economically and socially. Gradual emancipation laws put an expiration date on white mastery and black dependency.

Freed blacks began their lives in a country that had complex, contradictory and contested racial ideologies. For example, while northern citizens were dismantling race-based slavery their southern counterparts were fully committing to race-based slavery.

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[25] The state of Vermont abolished slavery in 1777, six years later, in 1783, the Massachusetts Supreme Court declared slavery unconstitutional. In 1780, the Pennsylvania state legislature passed the nation's first gradual emancipation law, legislators in Rhode Island and Connecticut followed in 1784. New York and New Jersey were among the last northern states to pass gradual emancipation laws in 1799 and 1804, respectively. New York (1827), Rhode Island (1842) and Connecticut (1848) all abolished slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century, the institution of slavery was never abolished in New Jersey and New Hampshire. Berlin, *Many Thousand Gone*, *222*-233.

However, while most northern states had legally begun dismantling black slavery their citizens remained explicitly racist. Historians have long acknowledged that black freedom was circumscribed in the North.[26] Many historians have argues that free blacks were economically, politically and socially marginalized throughout the "free" North. Several scholars have asked what it meant to be a "free" black person in a country that protected race-based slavery. However, I evaluate what it meant to be a free black person in a society that was and had been intimately involved in sustaining the institution of slavery throughout the Americas. Freed blacks in Rhode Island lived in a state that dominated the North American trade in slaves until the trade was outlawed in 1808 (nevertheless, many slave traders continued trading illegally well into the 1820s). Moreover, during the antebellum era, the vast majority of textile mills in Rhode Island produced negro cloth; therefore, sustaining a close relationship to the south's plantation society. Although white Rhode Island legally dismantled the institution of slavery in the eighteenth century, they explicitly remained racist throughout the nineteenth, a fact which was reflected in both their laws and actions. Interracial marriages were banned in 1789, and African American men were barred from voting in 1822. Free black Rhode Islanders also found themselves victims of two deadly race riots.[27] Black and white laborers were no longer servants in the same household, as they had been in the colonial period, but

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[26] See Edgar McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, Gary Nash, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford Press, 1991), George Fishman. *African American Struggle for Freedom and Equality*, Leslie Harris. *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), Russell Graham Hodges. *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1665-1865* (Madison: Madison House 1997) and James Horton. *In Hope of Liberty*.

[27] In 1824 and 1831 white mobs assaulted blacks and their property. Both riots were initially caused by black refusals to be publicly subservient and the law protected the white perpetrators. See Edgar McManus, *Black Bondage*, 183-184, Robert J. Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees: Providence Black Community in the Antebellum Era* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 56.

economic competitors.[28]Free blacks found themselves caught somewhere between slavery and freedom. They responded by building their own institutions, specifically mutual aid and benevolent societies. Despite increasing racism, black personal wealth, schools and churches grew in the first three decades of the nineteenth century.[29]

Historiography

There are four major themes in the scholarship concerning the institution of slavery in the north: northern ambivalence concerning slavery, the black experience and agency, the importance of slave labor, and the legacy of gradual emancipation. The first historians to write about northern slavery were apologists. They argued that northern slavery was mild, economically marginal and was ultimately destroyed by revolutionary ideals.[30] These arguments have been discredited.[31] The second theme in the scholarship has focused on the African American experience of slavery in the North. Scholars began to focus on what slaves did for themselves, not just what was done to them—the black

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[28] Robert Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees*, 44.

[29] Unlike the other states during the Jacksonian Era, Rhode Island did not drop property and tax qualifications for the vote. In 1830 both poor whites and blacks lobbied for the vote, though they did so independently. Thomas Dorr unsuccessfully tried to unite the races, but ultimately the Suffrage Association adopted a stance to fight only for white male suffrage—they did not want to be associated with abolitionist movement. When the Suffrage Association decided to march on Providence they met a black state commissioned regiment home guard, the Dorr Rebellion was put down, black men were re enfranchised along with all native born males. In Providence were the electoral races were often determined by a few hundred votes, the black voters could determine the election. A Whig-Negro alliance was developed in Rhode Island; the alliance was so strong that blacks voted for slaveholder Whig Zachary Taylor. Ibid. , 60-79.

[30] Late nineteenth century studies were largely legal histories of slavery detailing when and how slavery began and ended. See Henry Scofield Cooley, *A Study of Slavery in New Jersey* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1896) and Bernard Steiner, *The History of Slavery in Connecticut* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1893).

[31] Historian Edward Turner argued that slavery became harsher as time passed and suggested that post-revolutionary gradual emancipation laws were a result of economic incentives, not revolutionary ideals. Edward Raymond Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania, Slavery—Servitude—Freedom, 1639-1861* (Washington: The American Historical Association, 1911) and Berlin, *Many Thousand Gone.*

experience. These studies highlight the agency of African Americans and their resistance to the institution.[32] The third and most controversial theme in the scholarship questions whether or not the institution of slavery, slave labor in particular, was essential to the economic development of the North. In 1942, historian Lorenzo Greene highlighted the importance of New Englanders' involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, noting that "it created a wealthy class of slave-trading merchants, while the profits derived from this commerce stimulated cultural development and philanthropy."[33] The importance of slave labor to northern economies has been debated by scholars since Greene's assertion, but most scholars have argued and continue to argue that slave labor was critical to the development, survival and success of the northern colonies.[34] The fourth theme in the literature is directly connected to the third. If slavery was such an important part of the northern economy, how and why did white northerners allow for its bloodless, legal demise following the American Revolution? These scholars were particularly concerned with the legacy of gradual emancipation, asking why it occurred and what it meant for black freedom. These historians moved away from crediting emancipation to revolutionary rhetoric and the rise in abolitionism, instead focusing on the changing economy.[35] They argued northern emancipation was a result of the market revolution. In

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[32] See Edward McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), McManus, *Black Bondage in the North*, William Dillion Pierson, *Black Yankees: the Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1988), Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: the End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1991), and George Fishman, *African American Struggle for Freedom and Equality*. Hodges, *Root and Branch*.

[33] Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, 319.

[34] See McManus, *Black Bondage*. Melish, *Disowning Slavery*. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*.

[35] See Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery* and Gary Nash, *Freedom by Degree*. Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: the end of slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991).

other words, as the concentration of slaveholders occupations shifted from artisans to merchants, slave labor moved from the center to the periphery of the economy, which allowed for its slow demise.[36]

Those historians who have turned their attention to the cultural, social and economic implications of slaveholding and the process of emancipation in the North have most influenced my work, because it was those works that led me to question how businesses of slavery influenced the origins and development of the institution of slavery.[37] My work also relies on those scholars who have focused on Rhode Island. Sydney James' monograph on colonial Rhode Island acknowledges slavery's existence, but does not investigate how it was practiced and experienced or its importance to the economy.[38] Jay Coughtry's study examines Rhode Island's involvement with the slave trade. He details when, how, and why Rhode Island got involved in the trade. He argues that Rhode Island traders not only dominated the trade, but their activities fueled the local

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[36] See White, *Somewhat More Independent*.

[37] Joanne Pope Melish and Leslie Harris have turned their attention to the cultural, social and economic implications of slaveholding in the North. These scholars have convincingly argued that slave labor was vital to the economic development of the North. Melish has pointed out that slavery as an institution contributed to the expansion and diversification of the New England economy by freeing white men from common, but essential household labor. She also insists that the reason slavery was not abolished during the American Revolution was because it was an economic necessity. Similarly, Harris has argued that African slave labor was absolutely essential to the economic success of New York. She asserts that the institution of slavery transformed New York into America's most important city. My dissertation builds on the work of such revisionists and social historians of slavery. Melish, *Disowning Slavery.* Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*.

[38] The only history of slavery in Rhode Island, written in 1894 by William D. Johnston, is brief and apologist. Johnston's study primarily focuses on the demise of slavery in decades before the revolutionary war. However, he fails to address the curiously high number of slaves in the colony as well as the longevity of the institution in the state. By 1750 10% of Rhode Island's total population was enslaved and although the State General Assembly passed a gradual emancipation law in 1784 it did abolish the institution of slavery until 1842. See William D. Johnston, *Slavery in Rhode Island 1755-1776* (Providence: Printed For the Society, 1894) and Sydney James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Scribner, 1975).

economy.[39] Elaine Crane's study echoes Coughtry, although she focuses solely on the city of Newport. Crane argues that rise and fall of Newport can be traced through the rise and fall of unrestricted trade, particularly the trade in slaves. She asserts that the city's connection to the triangular trade sparked secondary and subsidiary industries that employed the majority of Newport's residents.[40] Several scholars have convincingly noted the importance of slave labor, the African slave trade and the West Indian trade in New England. However, how the businesses of slavery influenced the institution of slavery has not been fully explored. The scholarly literature concerning Rhode Islanders and slavery is relatively slim, considering how involved Rhode Islanders were in the businesses of slavery.

There have also been local studies on the institution of slavery in Rhode Island. Robert Fitts examines the relationships between masters and slaves in Narragansett from the eighteenth century through the Revolutionary War. His study contributes to the literature which dispels the myth that northern slavery was mild. He contends that nineteenth century descendents of slaveholders created a romantic past which erased and ignored conflicts between masters and slaves to alleviate white guilt and excuse the action of their ancestors.[41] Rommel-Ruiz's dissertation compares and contrasts New World slavery in Newport and Halifax during the American Revolution. He asks how the rhetoric of revolution affected the practice and reality of the institution of slavery. The social and cultural experiences of blacks are at the forefront of his study. His work is based on the contention that the American Revolution created an environment of social

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[39] See Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle*.

[40] See Elaine Forman Crane, *A Dependent People: Newport, Rhode Island, in the Revolutionary Era* (New York: Fordham University, 1985).

[41] See Robert K. Fitts, *Inventing New England's Slave Paradise: Master/Slave Relations in Eighteenth Century Narragansett, Rhode Island*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).

disturbance that enabled enslaved blacks to claim and seize their freedom.[42] A small body of literature focuses on abolitionism in Rhode Island, primarily concerned with those opposed to slavery and the reasons for that opposition.[43] These scholars also detail the anti-slavery tactics used by Quakers and female abolitionists, as well as, their precarious position in society. Still, studies of colonial, revolutionary, post colonial and antebellum Rhode Island have not yet allowed for a complete study of the experience of slavery, emancipation and freedom in Rhode Island—my research will address this void.

An examination of the businesses of slavery complicates the study of American slavery by revealing the cooperation and dependency among white northerners and southerners. It also highlights the difficult positions of free and enslaved blacks living among whites who were more dependent on perpetuating the institution of slavery outside of their borders than inside of their borders. Most northern colonists could not sustain themselves with agricultural enterprises, and consequently, turned to commerce. On the other hand, most southern colonists devoted nearly all of their efforts to staple crop production. Northerners and southerners needed one another; their economic success depended on cooperation. The development and maintenance of the institution of slavery in the Americas required a pro-slavery (African) consensus among whites. These slave dependent economies in the North and the South rested on the belief that people of African descent were not fit for freedom. The racial ideology of black inferiority and dependency was just as pervasive in the North as it was in South. In fact, white northerners did not just adopt southern attitudes about blacks, but helped to create

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[42] See Bryan Rommel-Ruiz, "Atlantic Revolutions: Slavery and Freedom in Newport Rhode Island and Halifax, Nova Scotia in the Era of the American Revolution" (PhD diss. , University of Michigan, 2000).

[43] See Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, *The Devotion of These Women: Rhode Island in the Antislavery Network* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002). Joseph Conforti, "Samuel Hopkins and the Revolutionary Anti-slavery Movement," Rhode Island History 38, no. 2 (1979): 39-49 and Sheryl A. Kujawa, "The Path of Duty Plain: Samuel Hopkins, Sarah Osborn, and Revolutionary Newport," Rhode Island History 58, no. 3 (2000): 75-89.

ideology of black dependency and white superiority. Furthermore, the African American experience of slavery was not confined to southern cities and plantations; black slaves lived, labored and fought for freedom in northern colonies and states.

The black experience in Rhode Island, from the colonial period through the antebellum era, was both similar to and distinct from that of other black northerners because of how intensively involved white Rhode Islanders were in the businesses of slavery. All British North American northern colonies and states participated in the Atlantic slave trade, but Rhode Islanders dominated it. Most northern colonies and states imported molasses from the West Indies to make rum, but in Rhode Island rum was the most important trading good. Rum was not only their number one export, but the currency they used to buy slaves. All New England states produced negro cloth; however, nearly every mill in Rhode Island was dedicated to its production. The free black community that emerged in Rhode Island had to contend with a white citizenry that had been and continued intimate economic connections to the institution of slavery. And while that economic activity may just have been just “business” to white Rhode Islanders, their business interests influenced that law, which in turn had direct effects on the lives of enslaved and free black Rhode Islanders. During the colonial period, people of African descent were held as slaves because the law supported race-based slavery, and after the Revolutionary War, freed people faced serious inequities because the law maintained race-based discrimination.

CHAPTER 1

THE ORIGINS OF THE INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY IN COLONIAL RHODE ISLAND, 1652 TO 1750

In Warwick, Rhode Island on July 28, 1725, Hager, a "negro" slave, was willed 10 shillings; her children were bequeathed 5 shillings each. Their master Captain Peter Green left Hager and her children money to "induce her [Hager] to be kinde to my Wife."[44] This "gift" raises several questions. Why would a master leave his slave what appears to be a bribe? Did Hager and her children receive their money when Green died? How did Green's wife and heirs feel about this clause in his will? Was there conflict between Green's wife and Hager? These questions while intriguing are nearly impossible to answer. However, this bequeathal raises the questions that frame this chapter. Why, how and when did race based-slavery became a part of the social, political and economic fabric of colony that expressly forbade the enslavement of whites, blacks and American Indians in the seventeenth century?

In Rhode Island, in 1652 and 1675 colonial officials banned the enslavement of blacks and American Indians, respectively. However, in 1708 they acknowledged both black and American Indian slavery, and by 1750 Rhode Islanders held the highest percentage of slaves in New England.[45] These facts are only odd when viewed outside

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[44] Fiske compiled and number three types of court documents including dockets, record books and file papers from Newport Courts from 1659 to 1783. Dockets were recorded by court clerks and listed cases in which they were to be heard. Record books were also kept by court clerks, who entered basic and essential data about each case. The file papers contain depositions--the statements of people giving testimony. In most cases it was nearly impossible to discern judgments because the verdicts were not filed with the other papers and without any notation to indicate dates, names or docket numbers. Hager was to be kept in Green wife's house for her use, and if she outlived Green's wife she would go to his executors. The Will of Capt. Peter Green which was part of the court case Peter Green, John Green and William Green vs. Elisha Green, Newport, Rhode Island, July 28, 1725. Jane Fletcher Fiske, *Gleanings from Newport Courtfile, 1659-1783* (Boxford, 1998), #243.

[45] Rhett S. Jones, "Plantation Slavery in the Narragansett Country of Rhode Island, 1690-1790: A Preliminary Study," *Plantation Society* 2, no. 2 (1986): 157.

of the economic history of colonial Rhode Island. As white Rhode Islanders became increasingly involved in the West Indian and Atlantic slave trades, they accepted and supported the enslavement of American Indians and people of African descent.[46] In Rhode Island the businesses of slavery, which emerged in the seventeenth century, made race-based slavery commonplace by 1750.

In Rhode Island, until 1750, the slave population was directly related to local participation in the Atlantic slave trade. Like all northern British colonists, Rhode Islanders held and traded slaves, but unlike other northern colonies Rhode Island held a significantly higher number of slaves and dominated the British North American trade in slaves. In 1750, 10% (3,347) of the colony's population was enslaved, compared to 2% (4,075) in Massachusetts, 3% (3,010) in Connecticut, 2% (550) in New Hampshire, 7% (5,354) in New Jersey, and 2% (2,822) in Pennsylvania.[47] In the North, only New Yorkers held more slaves with 14% of their total population enslaved. Furthermore, between 1726 and 1750, 123 slave ships disembarked from Rhode Island and carried 16,195 African slaves to the Americas; in comparison, only 36 slave ships left from all the other New England colonies carrying just 4,575 slaves. New Yorkers sent just three slave ships carrying only 407 African slaves.[48]

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[46] Like historian Thelma Foote I invoke the arguments of Stuart Hall that "racialized subjects are formations that arise out of historically specific projects and strategic relations of power." While Foote applies this theory to the project of colony building I apply it project of economic stability. Thelma Foote, *Black and White Manhattan: History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7 and Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Domination," *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (1980).

[47] Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 1998), 369 and Edgar McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973).

[48] Rhode Island traders controlled between 60% and 90% of the North American trade in slaves. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database on CD-ROM contains the records of 27, 233 trans-Atlantic slave ship voyages made between 1527 and 1866. The CD-ROM provides the basis for answering questions on the timing, direction, composition and human experiences of the forced migration of millions of Africans to the Americas. See Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle*

Rhode Islanders' participation in Atlantic commerce created a class of wealthy slaveholding merchants, and bolstered the local economy. Merchants and slave traders were much more than wealthy businessmen; they were town councilmen and governors. These men dominated the local economy and their practices shaped local racial ideology. Consequently, they wrote white superiority and black inferiority into local law. Slave law required all white Rhode Islanders, regardless of whether or not they owned slaves, to participate in the regulation of black and American Indian slaves, thereby creating a white master class. At the same time colonial lawmakers relegated American Indians and blacks to slavery. The eventual success of slavery in Rhode Island was a result of the business activities of the colony's wealthiest and politically powerful residents. An examination of the businesses of slavery in Rhode Island expands understandings of how slavery became such an integral part of the American experience in the North.

White Rhode Islanders found and exploited a significant niche in the Atlantic economy as merchants and slave traders.[49] They began purchasing enslaved blacks as they had increasing access to them through their trade with the West Indies and participation in the Atlantic slave trade. Illuminating how and why this occurred

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and David Eltis, et. al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade A Database on CD-ROM [CD-ROM]]* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[49] During the initial settlement period Rhode Islanders, like all New Englanders, were dependent on imports (basic necessities) from Europe, American Indian trade and cash held by new immigrants. Consequently, when immigration slowed in the 1640s New England fell into an economic depression. The region lacked a marketable staple crop such as sugar or tobacco. Nevertheless, by 1800 the region emerged as the birthplace of American Industry and trading in the Atlantic economy was responsible for this amazing transformation. Many New Englanders had experience with commercial agriculture, trade or manufacturing. Furthermore, Puritans valued hard work and civic action in the name of the common good. So, in short New Englanders had a culture that was conducive to supporting an merchant trade based economy. They became essential middle in the Atlantic Economy supplying the sugar islands with food, household goods and slaves, in return they received cash, molasses, sugar wine and tobacco for both home consumption and re-export to England. Furthermore, this trade encouraged the creation of subsidiary businesses like shipbuilding and distilleries. Margaret Ellen Newell, "The Birth of New England in the Atlantic Economy," in *Engines of Enterprise: An Economic History of New England*, ed. Peter Temin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 11-69.

complicates scholarly interpretations of the origins and development of slavery in northern British North American colonies. Like all New Englanders, Rhode Islanders traded with the West Indian planters and participated in the Atlantic slave trade. However, unlike other New England colonies, the West Indian trade became one of the main pillars of Rhode Island's economy.[50] The study of slavery must be expanded to include those societies, like Rhode Island, that helped maintain slave societies. The Atlantic economy was much more than the buying and selling of slaves. Plantation slaves and their masters had to be fed. Furthermore, they needed household goods such as candles and cookware. Northern colonies like Rhode Island contributed to the Atlantic economy by supplying these basic necessities. The importance the businesses of slavery and slaveholding to the colony of Rhode Island reminds us how little we know about how slavery bolstered northern economies and shaped racial attitudes. The origins and development of slavery in Rhode Island highlights the misconception that slavery was a southern institution. Such presumptions hamper our ability to understand American slavery and create a national synthesis of the institution.

To date, Sydney James has produced the best scholarship on colonial Rhode Island. His two studies, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* and *Colonial Metamorphoses in Rhode Island: A Study of Institutions of Change,* offer comprehensive histories of

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[50] The most successful British colonies, which were "essential start-up business ventures," were in the West Indies. These colonies had distinguished themselves by 1640 as the cash cows of the crown through the cultivation of sugar. Between 1640 and 1650 the Royal African Slave Trading Company brought almost 19,000 slaves to the Barbados and by 1700 there were 85,000 slaves in the colony. In 1645 a Boston merchant sent the first New England ship to Barbados to trade. The sugar planter began to buy nearly all their food from New England merchants as they devoted more and more land to the cultivation of white gold also known as sugar; this commerce became a incredible source of wealth for all New England colonies. Anne Farrow et al., *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited From Slavery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005) 45-55.

North America's smallest colony.[51] These studies fastidiously examine how and why the colony existed and thrived; however, issues concerning slavery beg for closer examination. For example, James acknowledges that Atlantic commerce was essential to Rhode Island's economic growth; however, he does not fully explore the details of the trade or expose how the businesses of slavery sustained and enlarged the local economy. Furthermore, he does not explain how Rhode Islanders' explicit and extensive involvement in maintaining the slave societies in the Americas. James was part of an entire generation of scholars that largely ignored the history of the origins and development of slavery in the northern colonies. While the study of slavery has become integral to the study of southern colonies like Virginia and South Carolina, the northern colonies, with the exception of New York and New Jersey, have been under studied.[52] In the southern colonies slavery was an incredibly visible institution, so it has been nearly impossible to ignore. On the other hand, the relative small numbers of enslaved people in the northern colonies has made it more difficult to ascertain how the institution of slavery shaped northern society. In the North, the businesses of slavery not only provided slave labor, it helped to create subsidiary businesses such as distilleries and ship building. A full accounting of Rhode Island's history necessitates an investigation of how the institution of slavery contributed to the economic autonomy and social identity of its colonial residents.

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[51] See Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Scribner, 1975) and Sydney V. James, *Colonial Metamorphoses in Rhode Island: A Study of Institutions of Change* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000).

[52] See Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975), Peter Wood, Black *Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Knopf, 1974), Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), George Fishman, *African American Struggle for Freedom and Equality: the Development of a People's Identity, New Jersey, 1624-1850* (New York: Garland, 1997) and Graham Russell Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1665-1865* (Madison: Madison House 1997).

In order to fully understand and appreciate the experiences of enslaved people in Rhode Island it is paramount to first examine the economic and social structures that framed those experiences. The economic interests and activities of white colonists required fundamental changes in the law regarding slavery. Slave law legitimized and protected race-based slavery; it also gave credence to emerging racial ideology in which only non-whites were fit for the institution of slavery. This process is studied here in three separate parts. The first part, the origins of trade, will examine how and why white Rhode Islanders turned to commerce, specifically how they came to dominate the American trade in slaves. The second part, the legalization of slavery, will evaluate how American Indians and blacks became slaves in a colony that had forbidden slavery. The third part, will briefly summarize the experience of slaves, especially in Newport and the Narragansett where the slave populations were most heavily concentrated

The Origins of Atlantic Commerce in Rhode Island

An examination and assessment of mostly secondary literature reveals why Rhode Islanders turned to Atlantic commerce and came to dominate the British North American trade in slaves. Historians of colonial New England have long noted that trade was absolutely essential to the success and survival of the northeastern colonies.[53] Trade was especially critical to the Britain's smallest colony. Rhode Island lacked land mass; it measures a mere forty by thirty miles. Furthermore, the truly fertile ground in the southern half of the colony was so rocky that it was most fit for grazing livestock.

Rhode Island was an ideal trading colony with an abundance of natural harbors and ports (figure 1). Water based commerce was a likely enterprise for Rhode Island colonists because water united the towns. Five hundred square miles of Rhode Island are

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[53] See Bernard Bailyn, The *New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), John McCusker and Russell Menard, *Economy of British America*, 1607-1789 (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1985) and John McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, *Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (New York: Cambridge Press, 2000).

covered by water, and there are over four hundred miles of Atlantic beaches.[54] Water connected Rhode Islanders to each other and the outside world. In colonial Rhode Island, it was simply easier to travel by water. The amount of goods and people transferred by water dwarfed those carried over land. During the last half of the seventeenth century, colonial and inter-colonial trade, as well as privateering served as excellent practice and training for their domination of the Britsh North American slave trade. Newport merchants began with small vessels; they traded within the colony along the coastline. After they mastered navigation of local waterways, they began engaging in commerce with their immediate neighbors in Connecticut, Massachusetts and finally, New York. These merchants later became involved in privateering—arming their small vessels—along the coast of Africa and Barbados.[55] Rhode Island farmers and merchants created a niche for themselves in the Atlantic economy. An interdependent relationship developed between the countryside and port cities (especially Newport and the Narragansett). Food producers and merchants, large and small, needed each other.[56]

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[54] Rhode Island Government Online, "Maps Rhode Island," http://www.ri.gov/ (29 June 2009).

[55] Bicknell, *The History of the State of Rhode Island*, 1047.

[56] Hodges argues that slavery was practiced in New York and East Jersey for two centuries because of the interdependence of the city and countryside; the city was the center of regional society, while the countryside supplied the city with food, fuel, and raw material for export—there was little separation between the rural and urban economies. Graham Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

Figure 1: Map of Rhode Island

The early history of Rhode Island is primarily a history of the city of Newport. It was from Newport that merchants conducted their business, and slave traders launched their first ships. The city also boasted the largest slave population in the colony. Though Newport was the third town founded, its residents transformed the city into the social and economic center of the colony. Atlantic commerce, the slave trade in particular, brought Rhode Island merchants, tradesmen and farmers together. Unlike other colonists, Rhode Island seventeenth century settlers had no collective vision. White Rhode Islanders lacked a cohesive identity and viable economy prior to their commitment to Atlantic commerce. As historian Sydney James eloquently stated, "Half the colonial period had gone by before Rhode Island was indelibly on the map—that is, before it enjoyed a flourishing local patriotism and achieved internal order, reasonable immunity from the territorial ambitions of its neighbors, and safety from British plans to merge it with a larger colony."[57] Indeed, their lack of solidarity and the threat of annexation from surrounding established colonies led to instability, which nearly destroyed the colony.

Rhode Island settlers differed considerably from their neighbors; they had English sponsorship rather than a charter, and no single dominant religion. All four founders had been expelled from Massachusetts as a result of their "radical" religious beliefs.[58] The first town, Providence, was established by Roger Williams in 1636. Two years later, Anne Hutchison founded Portsmouth. Within the same year, religious divisions in Portsmouth led William Coddington to set up the town of Newport. Warwick, the last of the four original towns, was established in 1643 by Samuel Gorton. Gorton had been banished from Portsmouth and encountered frosty receptions in Providence and Newport. The first colonists were physically and ideologically disconnected. All four towns were

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[57] James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 1.

[58] Ibid., 24-30.

founded separately, in isolation from each other.[59] In 1644, the towns were finally united under a charter from the crown; however, they shared no central government.

No systematic rule of law existed in early Rhode Island. Infighting between the towns threatened the colony's very existence. The differing religious convictions of the four original town founders created significant divisions during the initial settlement period. During the last half of the seventeenth century conditions verged on anarchy as the towns battled over land and land boundaries. It was difficult to solve land disputes that crossed town lines because political power was concentrated in local governments, rather than in a central colonial government. The lack of internal solidarity among the settlers prompted a crown takeover between 1675 and 1700.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the colony became a dominion of New England.[60] The takeover coincided with the end of the monopoly held by the English Royal African Company, which excluded colonists from participating in the slave trade. After the company lost its monopoly in 1700 and the English obtained the Spanish assiento in 1713, international trade opened to all British North American colonists.[61] In Rhode Island, a few independent merchants began sending experimental slaving voyages to West Africa. These experimental voyages grew increasingly common and profitable, and within less than 30 years evolved into one of the pillars of the local economy.

In Rhode Island, slave trading and political power went hand in hand. During the colonial period most Rhode Island governors were of the merchant class. In fact, many

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[59] Ibid., 13.

[60] Ibid., 106-10.

[61] The end to the monopoly held by the English Royal African Company allowed the colonists an opportunity to freely and legally participate in the Atlantic Slave Trade. The Spanish assiento to the British allowed British slave trading to transport slaves directly from Africa to Spanish West Indies.

were slave traders. In order to fully understand how and why Rhode Islanders were so committed to Atlantic commerce it is essential to evaluate the motives of the colonial governors. Colonial governors were elected annually through popular vote; consequently, their constituents "had their ears." Furthermore, the governor's primary duty was to negotiate between the General Assembly and Board of Trade or the colonial agent in London.[62] For Rhode Island governors, promoting and protecting Atlantic commerce was not only in their political interest; it was a personal investment. For example, Peleg Sanford, who acted as governor from 1680-1683, exported horses, beef, pork, butter and dried peas to Barbados in exchange for sugar and molasses. Samuel Cranston, a slave trader and captain, was elected thirty times; he served as governor from 1696 to 1725. William Wanton and John Wanton served concurrently from 1732 through 1740; the Wantons were prosperous slave trading Quakers. [63]

Under the leadership of Samuel Cranston, Rhode Islanders regained colonial status and fully committed to Atlantic commerce and the institution of slavery. First and foremost, Cranston cracked down on piracy, which was the major crown complaint against Rhode Islanders. The London based Board of Trade, which oversaw commerce in the colonies, considered Rhode Island a rogue colony—a safe haven for pirates. In 1685, trade agent Edward Randolph asked for a warrant against Rhode Island's charter for violation of trade laws. He accused them of "several articles of high misdemeanors."[64] Five years later Lord Bellomont, another trade agent sent to Rhode Island, echoed the themes of his predecessor. He charged, "The government is notoriously faulty in

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[62] Paul Weiler, *Rhode Island---West Indies Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Masters Thesis, University of Iowa August, 1947), p 5-6.

[63] Ibid., 15.

[64] John Russell Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol . III 1687-1706* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Company, 1859), 175.

countenancing and harboring of pirates, who have openly brought in and disposed of their effects there; whereby the place has been greatly enriched."[65] Bellomont died in 1701, and his misfortune probably saved Rhode Islanders from losing their new charter. However, under Cranston those suspected of engaging in piracy were investigated and prosecuted; his display of good faith set Rhode Island merchants on the path of greater cooperation with the crown.[66] Cranston also convinced local officials to obey the English trade laws, support the authority of royal officials to supervise trade business, and take part in wars against the French. Rhode Islanders relinquished some of their local authority in exchange for greater access to Atlantic commerce.[67] Commerce grew considerably during Cranston's first decade in office (figures 2 and 3).

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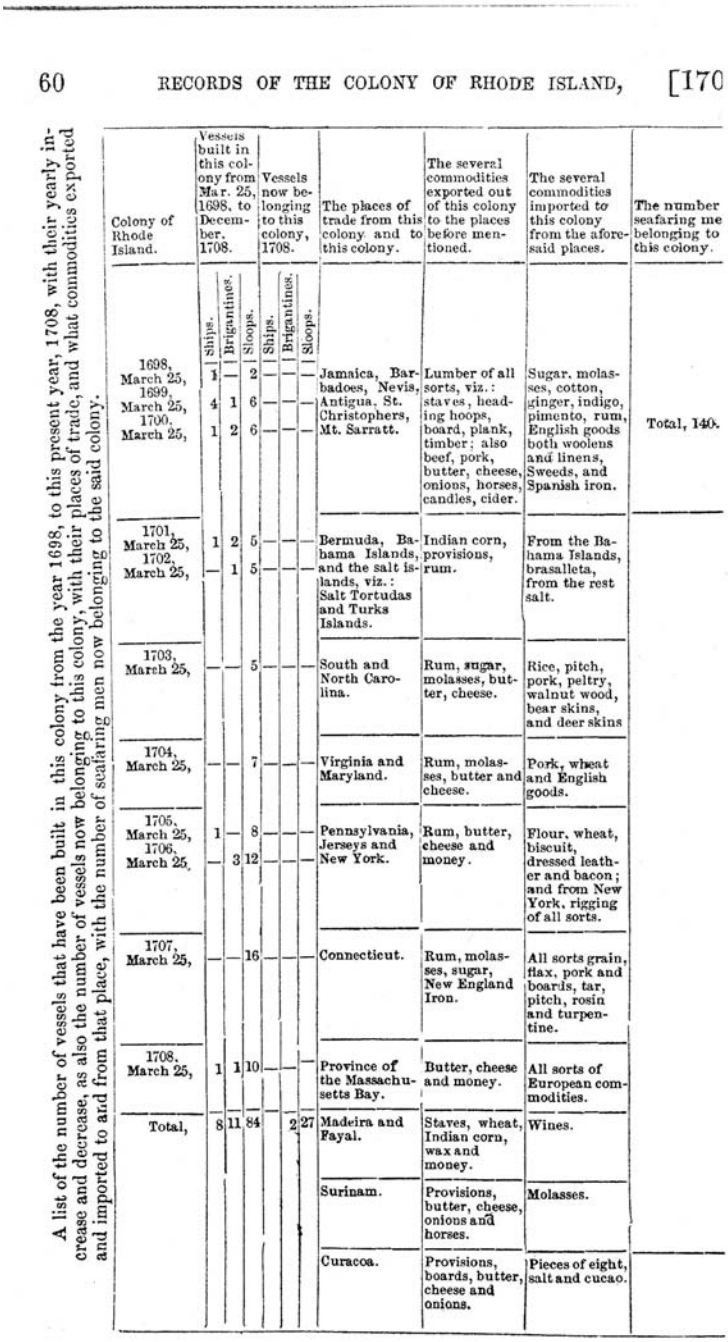
[65] Ibid., 387.

[66] Bicknell, *The History of the State of Rhode Island*, 1048.

[67] James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 119.

Figure 2 Rhode Island Ship building, Imports and Exports, 1698-1708



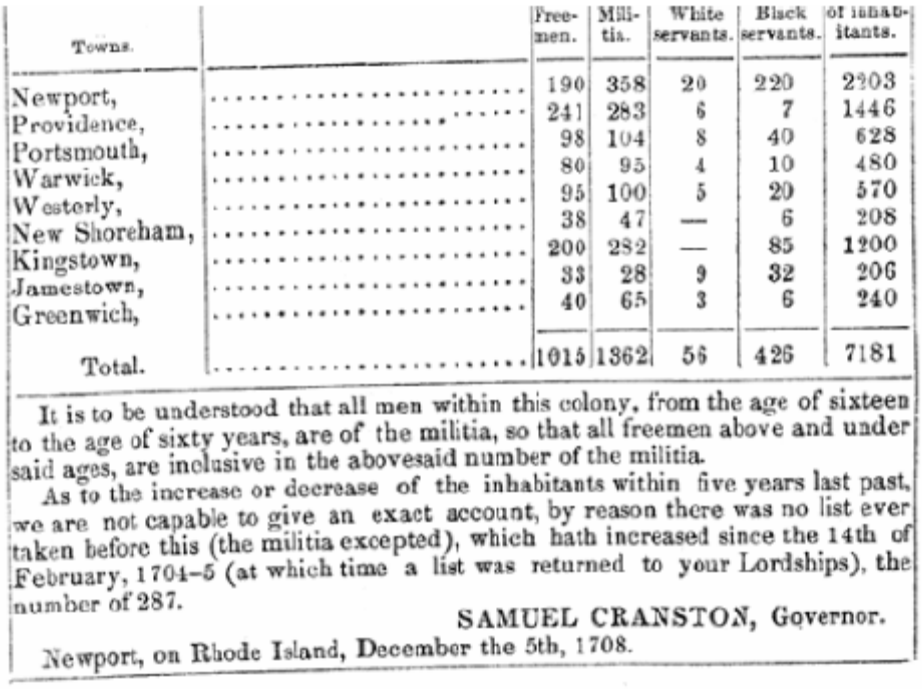
60 RECORDS OF THE COLONY OF RHODE ISLAND, [170

A list of the number of vessels that have been built in this colony from the year 1698, to this present year, 1708, with their yearly increase and decrease, as also the number of vessels now belonging to this colony, with their places of trade, and what commoditics exported and imported to and from that place, with the number of seafaring men now belonging to the said colony.

Colony of Rhode Island.	Vessels built in this colony from Mar. 25, 1698, to December. 1708.			Vessels now belonging to this colony, 1708.			The places of trade from this colony and to this colony.	The several commodities exported out of this colony to the places before mentioned.	The several commodities imported to this colony from the aforesaid places.	The number seafaring me belonging to this colony.
	Ships.	Brigantines.	Sloops.	Ships.	Brigantines.	Sloops.				
1698, March 25,	1	—	2	—	—	—	Jamaica, Barbadoes, Nevis, Antigua, St. Christophers, Mt. Sarratt.	Lumber of all sorts, viz.: staves, heading hoops, board, plank, timber; also beef, pork, butter, cheese, onions, horses, candles, cider.	Sugar, molasses, cotton, ginger, indigo, pimento, rum, English goods both woolens and linens, Sweeds, and Spanish iron.	Total, 140.
1699, March 25,	4	1	6	—	—	—				
1700, March 25,	1	2	6	—	—	—				
1701, March 25,	1	2	5	—	—	—	Bermuda, Bahama Islands, and the salt islands, viz.: Salt Tortudas and Turks Islands.	Indian corn, provisions, rum.	From the Bahama Islands, brasalleta, from the rest salt.	
1702, March 25,	—	1	5	—	—	—				
1703, March 25,	—	—	5	—	—	—	South and North Carolina.	Rum, sugar, molasses, butter, cheese.	Rice, pitch, pork, peltry, walnut wood, bear skins, and deer skins	
1704, March 25,	—	—	7	—	—	—	Virginia and Maryland.	Rum, molasses, butter and cheese.	Pork, wheat and English goods.	
1705, March 25,	1	—	8	—	—	—	Pennsylvania, Jerseys and New York.	Rum, butter, cheese and money.	Flour, wheat, biscuit, dressed leather and bacon; and from New York, rigging of all sorts.	
1706, March 25,	—	3	12	—	—	—				
1707, March 25,	—	—	16	—	—	—	Connecticut.	Rum, molasses, sugar, New England Iron.	All sorts grain, flax, pork and boards, tar, pitch, rosin and turpentine.	
1708, March 25,	1	1	10	—	—	—	Province of the Massachusetts Bay.	Butter, cheese and money.	All sorts of European commodities.	
Total,	8	11	84	2	2	7	Madeira and Fayal.	Staves, wheat, Indian corn, wax and money.	Wines.	
							Surinam.	Provisions, butter, cheese, onions and horses.	Molasses.	
							Curacoa.	Provisions, boards, butter, cheese and onions.	Pieces of eight, salt and cucao.	

Source: This chart was copied from Bartlett, John, Russell, ed. *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England V. IV 1707-1740.* Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Company, 1859.

Figure 3 1708 Rhode Island Male Population by status, race and seafaring occupation



Towns.	Freemen.	Militia.	White servants.	Black servants.	Inhabitants.
Newport,	190	358	20	220	2203
Providence,	241	283	6	7	1446
Portsmouth,	98	104	8	40	628
Warwick,	80	95	4	10	480
Westerly,	95	100	5	20	570
New Shoreham,	38	47	—	6	208
Kingstown,	200	282	—	85	1200
Jamestown,	33	28	9	32	206
Greenwich,	40	65	3	6	240
Total.	1015	1362	56	426	7181

It is to be understood that all men within this colony, from the age of sixteen to the age of sixty years, are of the militia, so that all freemen above and under said ages, are inclusive in the abovesaid number of the militia.

As to the increase or decrease of the inhabitants within five years last past, we are not capable to give an exact account, by reason there was no list ever taken before this (the militia excepted), which hath increased since the 14th of February, 1704–5 (at which time a list was returned to your Lordships), the number of 287.

SAMUEL CRANSTON, Governor.

Newport, on Rhode Island, December the 5th, 1708.

Source: This table was copied from Bartlett, John, Russell, ed. *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England V. IV 1707-1740.* Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Company, 1859.

Between March 25, 1698 and December 1708, Rhode Islanders built eight ships, eleven brigantines and, eighty-four sloops. Twenty-seven sloops and two brigantines belonged to Rhode Island colonists.[68] Furthermore, over 7% of the male population was identified as "seafaring men."[69] Cranston credited this growth in a business of slavery to the colony's limited land and proximity to the Atlantic:

> The reason of which increase (as I apprehend) is chiefly to be attributed to the inclination the youth on Rhode Island have to the sea. The land on said island, being all taken up and improved in small farms, so that the farmers, as their families increase, are compelled to put or place their children to trades or calling; but their inclinations being mostly to navigation.[70]

Rhode Islanders recognized Atlantic commerce as their best opportunity for economic security. Their potential as merchants and slave traders was significantly increased by their cooperation with the royal government. Rhode Islanders exported lumber, beef, pork, butter, cheese, onions, cider, candles, and horses; they imported sugar, molasses, cotton, ginger, indigo, linen, woolen clothes and Spanish iron. Merchants sent ships primarily from Newport to Antigua, Jamaica, Barbados, Guadalupe, St. Thomas, Marincio, St. Lucia, St. Christopher, Surinam, South America and the Bay of Honduras. Rhode Island merchants also transported goods of their neighbors. Their trade with England was nearly non-existent, the goods they did send were sent via Boston.[71]

Rhode Islanders' eighteenth century political and economic autonomy coincided with their entry into Atlantic commerce. The rise of Newport as a mercantile center was largely a consequence of the rise of the central government. Wealthy merchants and

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[68] A brigantine is a two-masted sailing ship that is square-rigged except for a fore-and-aft mainsail. A sloop is a fore-and-aft rigged boat with one mast and a single jib.. John Russell Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. IV 1707-1740* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Company, 1859), 60.

[69] There a total of 1015 freemen in the colony in 1708 and 140 of them identified themselves as seafaring men, just over 7%. Ibid., 59-60.

[70] Ibid., 58.

[71] Weiler, *Rhode Island*, 20-21.

businessmen understood that a central government was necessary for profitable commerce. The central government built roads, regulated the sale of commodities and ferries (which ended debilitating conflicts over land), established a judiciary and most importantly created a currency. The government also published a comprehensive book of statutes, prescribed methods of town government, established rules for the organization of proprietors, created courts compatible with English common law, and provided regulation of families and mills. The central government consolidated power between the political and business communities through a commitment to commercial enterprise.[72]

Throughout the eighteenth century, Rhode Island traders controlled over sixty percent of the North American trade in African slaves.[73] From a British North American vantage point they were major players, although they were late and minor participants in Atlantic the system as a whole. Rhode Island traders, merchants and farmers were a part of a larger Atlantic economy, and as the eighteenth century progressed they became increasingly involved in that international system. The Atlantic economy, in turn, was dependent on the collective activities of northern colonies like Rhode Island to provide slaves and food to the plantation societies in the West Indies.

The Atlantic slave trade was a complex, extraordinary, and unprecedented movement of peoples and capital. European states were the essential organizing body of the trade, while private investors provided the financing. African traders sold slaves to European middle men; Europeans also engaged in kidnapping. European colonists in the Americas became dependent on slave labor from Africa—especially in the West Indies and South America.[74] Rhode Island merchants were crucial middle men for slave

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[72] See James, *Colonial Metamorphoses*.

[73] See Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981).

[74] See John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (New York: Cambridge University, 1992).

markets in the West Indies and North America. Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, they sold 66% of their slaves in the West Indies, 31% in North America and 3% in South America.[75] Rhode Island merchants also transported food grown by Narragansett farmers to the West Indies. In other words, Rhode Island farmers and merchants helped feed one of the largest slave societies in the Americas.

Rhode Island slave traders made their money by playing it safe; they learned from the mistakes of the Portuguese, Spanish and British traders. For example, Rhode Island slavers sailed small ships which allowed them to avoid long waits and disease on the African coast. Their strategy resulted in smaller, but more certain gains. However, their business was not without serious risk and danger. George Scott, a Newport slave trader, nearly lost his life and livelihood when "his" human cargo attempted to take over his ship. During a voyage in 1730, as he transported 96 slaves from the coast of Guinea to the West Indies, the male slaves somehow freed themselves from their chains. They killed three white watch men—the doctor, a cooper and a sailor—by throwing them overboard. Scott's crew engaged in a gun fight with the slaves and barely suppressed the rebellion.[76] Just two years later Captain Perkins, a Rhode Island slave trader, was killed by slaves who managed to escape their chains. The rebellion proved costly—several slaves were killed.[77] Despite the dangers, what had begun as an experiment for wealthy merchants in the 1720s dominated Rhode Island's economy for nearly a century.[78]

During the first half of the eighteenth century, Rhode Islanders sent 131 ships to Africa, which then transported over 17,000 African slaves to the New World. The rest of

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[75] See Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle*.

[76] "Shipping News," *Rhode Island Gazette*, 25 October 1732, Issue 5 p. 2.

[77] George Scott, "The following is a Particular account of Negroes Rising and Overcoming Capt. George Scott, in His Passage from Guinea," *The Boston Gazette* 26 April 1731, Issue 592.

[78] See Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle*.

the colonies combined (northern and southern) sent only 57 ships and transported fewer than 7,000 slaves.[79] As historian Jay Coughtry argued, the North American trade in slaves was essentially the Rhode Island slave trade.

[79] Eltis, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade A Database*.

Table 1: Slave Ships that Disembarked from British North American Colonies (Number of slaves transported to the Americas)

	1701-1725	**1726-1750**
Rhode Island	8 (948)	123 (16,195)
Non-RI New England	4 (363)	36 (4,575)
PA, DE, NJ	1 (137)	2 (148)
New York	4 (355)	3 (407)
Carolinas	1 (48)	3 (415)
Virginia	1 (144)	2 (247)

Source: This table was compiled through queries from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. Eltis, The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database

As Table 1 demonstrates the vast majority of the slave ships that disembarked from British North America left from ports in Rhode Island— it was the smallest and least populated colony.[80] Newport, the most prominent city in the colony, was dependent on Atlantic commerce.[81] The city was unique compared to other northern port cities, because of its direct and extensive involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. The city's great merchant families including, the Malbones', Banisters', Gardners', Wantons', Brentons', Collins', Vernons', Channings' and Aaron Lopez and his father-in-law Jacob Rodrigues Rivera collected goods from all who would sell and redirected them to whoever would buy in Africa, the West Indies, London and North American ports cities.[82] The slave trade dominated their activities, and also sparked numerous secondary and subsidiary industries that employed the many of Newport's residents. Most of the vessels that left Newport were headed to other British mainland colonies; however, the goods received through the West Indian trade were absolutely crucial to the economy. Rum was the colony's major export—a product made from molasses, which was acquired by selling foodstuffs and slaves in the West Indies. In 1713, Rhode Island merchants introduced rum on the African coast; the "new" liquor quickly replaced French brandy as the choice trading good.[83]

Merchants held a particularly important position in colonial New England. Like all New Englanders, commerce, rather than agriculture, shaped their economic ambitions. Merchants were a strategically placed class.[84] Their activities helped create a market for

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[80] Eltis, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*

[81] Elaine Crane, *A Dependent People: Newport, Rhode Island, in the Revolutionary Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), 10.

[82] See Crane, *A Dependent People*.

[83] Weiler, *Rhode Island,* 20.

[84] Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 7.

local farmers and helped support subsidiary industries, particularly distilling rum and the building trades. After 1730, most trades and professions in Rhode Island were directly tied to slaveholding and slave trading. Sailors, caulkers, sail makers, rope makers, and painters were employed by slave traders. Furthermore, local fishermen and farmers provided foodstuffs for trade with the West Indies in exchange for cash, molasses and rum. Rum quickly became their number one export. Coopers made barrels to ship the rum, which was exchanged for slaves who were sold in the West Indies and South America.[85] Clerks, scribes and warehouse overseers conducted the business of the trade.[86] The plantation societies in the Americans provided a market for Rhode Island's farmers, tradesmen and slave traders.

By 1740, Atlantic commerce had become central the local economy. In a report to the Board of Trade Governor Samuel Ward declared, "Navigation is one main pillar on which this government is supported at the present." He also reported that Rhode Islanders owned more than 120 vessels, which were "all constantly employed in trade." In fact, of the 120 Rhode Island vessels engaged in trade, all but ten of them were employed in the slave trade.[87] Most of the vessels sailed back and forth to the West Indies; however, many vessels were employed in trade along the African coast, neighboring colonies, and even a few in Europe. Ward also noted that five privateers, courtesy of Newport merchants, equipped with crews of almost 400 men sailed against the Spanish.[88] These merchants also provided military support for the colony. Furthermore, Ward bragged that

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[85] Irving H. Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen: The Story of the Negro in Rhode Island* (Providence: The Urban League of Greater Providence 1954), 5.

[86] Wim Klooster and Alfred Padula, *The Atlantic World: Essays on Slavery, Migration, and Imagination* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2005), 34.

[87] Weiler, *Rhode Island*, 20.

[88] John Russell Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. V 1741-1756* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Company, 1859), 8-14.

the other British and New England colonies were dependent upon the commerce of Rhode Islanders:

> The neighboring governments have been in a great measure, supplied with rum, sugar, molasses and other West India goods by us brought home and sold to them here. Nay, Boston, itself, the Metropolis of Massachusetts, is not a little obliged to us for rum and sugar and molasses which they distil into rum, for the use of the fishermen &c. The West Indies have likewise reaped great advantage from our trade, by being supplied with lumber of all sorts suitable for building houses, sugar works and making casks; beef, pork, flour and other provisions, we are daily carrying to them, with horses to turn their mills and vessels for their own use; and our African trade often furnished them with slaves for their plantations.[89]

It was also during the 1740s that significant numbers of Providence merchants entered the commercial trade.[90] Rhode Islanders' involvement in the Atlantic economy gave them increasing access to slaves. In fact, Rhode Island merchants not only traded slaves, they soon owned a disproportionate number of them.[91]

The Legalization of slavery in Rhode Island

The legal history of slavery in Rhode Island is unique among British North American colonies, because Rhode Islanders explicitly forbade both black and American Indian slavery. Nevertheless, slaveholding thrived in colonial Rhode Island. As Table 2 indicates, from 1680-1750, Rhode Islanders owned two to three times as many slaves and most of their neighbors.[92] In the seventeenth century, the vast majority of slaves in Rhode Island were of Indian descent; however, by the mid-eighteenth century the vast

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[89] Ibid., 5:14.

[90] Howard W. Preston, *Rhode Island and the Sea* (Providence: State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations,1859), 34.

[91] Crane, *A Dependent People*, 24.

[92] In the North, in 1680, slaves accounted for just over two percent of the total population and just over five percent by 1750. Slaveholding remained especially small in colonial New England; most slaveholders held two or fewer slaves. Despite their relatively small numbers, slave labor made the northern colonies viable. Northern slaves cleared the forest, built the roads, constructed the first permanent dwellings and produced the food. Slaves labored in all aspects of the northern economy—as farmhands, domestic servants, sailors, assistants and artisans.

majority of slaves were of African descent. In New England, as no less than elsewhere in North America, American Indian slavery has been understudied, while African slavery has often been studied in isolation; both tendencies have skewed our understanding of the origins of slavery in colonial British North America.[93] In Rhode Island, American Indian slavery was not inconsequential, and African slavery in British North America did not evolve in a vacuum. Moreover, race-based slave law led to racial ideologies which characterized blacks and American Indians as perpetual dependents and social deviants. The story of slavery in Rhode Island requires us to investigate the following questions: How did Rhode Island Islanders' shift from forbidding slavery in the seventeenth century to owning the highest percentage of slaves in New England by 1750? Why did white Rhode Islanders commit to African, rather than American Indian slavery?

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[93] As historian Allan Gallay has argued, it is paramount that American Indian and African slavery are studied in conjunction, not isolation. Allan Gallay, The *Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of The English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

Table 2: Slave Populations in the northern British North American Colonies, 1680-1750 (percentage of total population)

	1680	1700	1720	1750
North	1,895 (2)	5,206 (4)	14,081 (5)	30,172 (5)
Rhode Island	175 (6)	300 (3)	543 (5)	3,347 (10)
Vermont	---	---	---	---
Massachusetts	170 (<1)	2,150 (2)	2,150 (2)	4,075 (2)
Connecticut	50 (<1)	450 (2)	1,093 (2)	3,010 (3)
New Hampshire	75 (4)	130 (2)	170 (2)	550 (2)
New York	1,200 (12)	2,256 (12)	5,740 (16)	11,014 (14)
New Jersey	200 (6)	840 (6)	2,385 (6)	5,354 (7)
Pennsylvania	25 (4)	430 (8)	2,000 (8)	2,822 (2)

Source: This table was complied from census data in Ira Berlin's, *Many Thousands Gone*, 369

In 1652, Rhode Island officials from Providence and Warwick, towns not yet involved in Atlantic commerce, prohibited the enslavement of whites and blacks.[94] These officials from Providence and Warwick claimed to speak for the entire colony.

> Whereas, it is a common course practiced amongst English men to buy negers, to that end they have them for service or slave forever: let it be ordered, no blacke mankind or white being forced by covenant bond, or otherwise, to serve any man or his assighnes longer than ten years or until they come to bee twentie four years of age, if they be taken in under fourteen, from the time of their cominge with the liberties of this Collonie.[95]

Twenty-three years later, in 1676, these same towns also prohibited the enslavement of American Indians, declaring, "noe Indian in this Collony be a slave, but only to pay their debts or for their bringinge up, or custody they have received."[96] Nevertheless, in 1677, immediately following Metacom's War, a committee headed by Roger Williams of Providence sold American Indian prisoners of war into slavery, averaging thirty two shillings or twelve bushels of corn per prisoner.[97] In 1680, according to the colonial census, there were 175 slaves in Rhode Island. And in 1696, four Africans of a "cargo" of 47 were purchased from the *Seaflower* in Newport.[98] Rhode Island settlers simply ignored the dictates of a fractured and ineffectual colonial government. But, perhaps more importantly they were not held to any legal account for breaking the law. First through practice and then through the law white Rhode Islanders created a racialized

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[94] William D. Johnston, *Slavery in Rhode Island, 1755-1776* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1894), 114.

[95] It is important to note that only the northern towns of Providence and Warwick passed laws banning slavery. Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. V 1741-1756,* 243.

[96] There was no record of individual town populations. Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. V 1741-1756* 535.

[97] Metacom's War secured English hegemony in New England—it was a crushing defeat for American Indians. Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen*, 5.

[98] Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. V 1741-1756* , 51.

practice in which American Indians and people of African descent were slaves, and whites were a part of the master class.

Like European settlers throughout the northeast, Rhode Island's first European colonists initially depended on local American Indians to get a lay of the land, to trade with, and acquire property. Roger Williams, the colony's most prominent founder, had an amicable relationship with the Narragansett Indians. He purchased land from Sachems for the town of Providence and assisted Anne Hutchison in acquiring land for Portsmouth.[99] However, as the colony grew, relations quickly deteriorated as colonists fought over land boundaries and extended their holdings into American Indian territory. In 1644, the Newport town council made it illegal to sell firearms of any sort to the American Indians and the town of Portsmouth banished them "to live in the woods." Furthermore, white merchants were not to trade with, sell liquor to, or repair the firearms of American Indians.[100]

Nearly half a century later, in 1703, the Rhode Island General Assembly wrote race-based slavery and racism into law.

> If any negroes or Indians either freemen, servants, or slaves, do walk in the street of the town of Newport, or any other town in this Collony, after nine of the clock of night, without certificate from their masters, or some English person of said family with, or some lawfull excuse for the same, that it shall be lawful for any person to take them up and deliver them to a Constable.

This act identified blacks and American Indians as slaves; furthermore, it restricted the movements of all blacks and American Indians, regardless of their status. Not only are blacks and American Indians associated with slavery, they are also identified as likely

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[99] The Naragansett were the most populous American Indian group in the Rhode Island. A deed (1638) acknowledging the agreement between the first colonist and the Narragansett Sachems Conanicus and Miantonomi for rights to the lands between the Pawtuckette and Pawtuxcette Rivers. John Russell Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island vol.1 1636-1663* (. Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Company, 1859), 35.

[100] Ibid., 123, 153 and 155.

criminals who should not be allowed out after dark. Those blacks and American Indians, free or enslaved, found out after curfew were "to be whipped at the publick shipping post in said town, not exceeding fifteen stripes upon their naked backs." The act also forbade freemen from "entertain men's servants, either negroes or Indians, without leave of their master or to whom they do belong" after 9:00 pm, under threat of a five shilling fine.[101] Just five years later, in 1708, the Rhode Island General Assembly further endorsed and protected race-based slavery. The assembly legally acknowledged holding blacks and Indians as slaves.[102] Because, these two acts were written by a collective body, the Rhode Island General Assembly, they superseded town issued laws forbidding slavery. Significantly, assembly members newly attached race to the institution of slavery, as local laws had not; "negroes and Indians" were slaves and servants. Whites, on the other hand, had responsibilities in regulating and controlling the behavior of enslaved people.

In the first decades of the eighteenth century, Rhode Island officials further restricted the movements and behavior of slaves, as they continued to write racial practice, therefore racial ideology into the law.[103] For example, in 1714, the General Assembly forbade slaves to board ferries alone, even under the directives of their masters, without a certificate of ownership carried by their master or mistress or some person in authority. Boatmen and ferrymen who violated the law were fined 20 shillings,

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[101] John Russell Bartlett, ed. *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England V. III 1678-1706* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Company, 1859), 492.

[102] Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. V 1741-1756, 50.*

[103] Beginning in 1711 both blacks and American Indians were commonly referred to as commodities. Ibid. , 131.

and were held responsible for any other financial damages to the master.[104] Again whites were required to participate in the regulation of slaves in the colony. These types of directives made all whites part of the master class. Again, the General Assembly attached race to the institution of slavery, but referring specifically to people of African descent.[105] This law again makes clear that "negroes and mulattoes" were slaves—dependents.

The growth of racial slavery as part of local custom and practice was also revealed in the law suits that white Rhode Islanders brought against each other. Court records reveal constant law suits concerning slave stealing and non-payment of slave hires. Bathsheba Hart of Newport, widow of Peter Bourse a merchant, sued Stephen Mumford of Newport, a merchant, for stealing £900 and "a Negro man named Sandall and a Negro woman named Katherine." [106] Thomas Potter of Westerly a yeoman sued John Shelden, a husbandman in South Kingstown, and Benjamin Shearman, yeoman in South Kingstown, for trespassing and taking away "two Negro boys named Pero and Scipio of the price of £240 together." Shelden and Sherman claimed that the "goods"

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[104] *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. 4 1707-1740*, ed. John Russell Bartlett (Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Co, 1859), 179.

[105] Whereas several negroes and mulatto slaves that have run away from their masters or mistresses, under pretense of being sent or employed by their masters or mistresses, upon some service, and have been carried over the ferries, out and into the colony, and suffered to pass through the several towns under the aforesaid pretense, to the considerable damage and charge of their owners, and many times to the loss of their slaves. Be it therefore enacted by this Assembly, and by the authority thereof it is enacted, that no ferryman or boatman, whatsoever, within this colony, shall carry or bring any slave as aforesaid, over their ferriers, without a certificate under that hands of their masters or mistresses, or some person in authority, upon the penalty of paying all costs and damages their said masters or mistresses shall sustain. Ibid.

[106] Bathsheba Hart vs. Stephen Mumford, Newport, Rhode Island, June 15, 1715. Ibid., #42.

were taken to settle against the estate of the late Thomas Potter [the plaintiff's father]. The verdict was for the defendants.[107] Samuel Holmes, a Newport merchant, sued William May, a Newport "pavier," for 49 days work of the plantiff's Indian man Cubit.[108] Paul Collins of Newport, a merchant, sued Joseph Sawdy, a Newport mason, for 15 days work from "his Neges Ceasar Jurney." [109] White Rhode Islanders were unruly slaveholders; they stole from and cheated one another. They turned to the courst to settle their conflicts over slave property. The court had to regularize the sell, hire and inheritance of slave property. Men and women from various walks of life owned and hired slaves, whether they were gentleman, tradesmen, farmers or widows. Race-based slaveholding was an integral part of life in colonial Rhode Island.

By 1728, the practice of race-based slavery had extended to an ideology of race that extended beyond bondage. The General Assembly introduced the ideology of black dependency into law. They passed a law requiring masters to post a £100 bond for manumitted slaves in an attempt to protect the white public from the burden of supporting freed slaves. White Rhode Islanders assumed that all blacks would be unable or unwilling to support themselves.

> Forasmuch, as great charge, trouble and inconveniencies have arisen to the inhabitants of divers towns in this colony, by the manumitting and setting free mulatto and negro slaves…Be it enacted by the General Assembly of this colony, and by the authority of the same it is enacted, that no mulatto or negro slave, shall be hereafter manumitted, discharged or set free, or at

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[107] Peter Green, John Green and William Green vs. Elisha Green, Newport, Rhode Island, July 28, 1725. Ibid., #243.

[108] Samuel Holmes vs. William, Newport Rhode Island, May September 6, 1715. Ibid., # 50.

[109] Paul Collins vs. Joseph Sawdy, Newport Rhode Island, July 27, 1715. Ibid., # 57.

> liberty, until sufficient security be given to the town treasurer of the town or place where such person dwells, in a valuable sum of not less than 100 pounds, to secure and indemnify the town or place from all charge for, or about such mulatto or negro, to be manumitted and set at liberty, in case he or she by sickness, lameness or otherwise, be rendered incapable to support him or herself. And no mulatto or negro hereafter manumitted, shall be deemed or accounted free, for whom security shall not be given as aforesaid, but shall be the proper charge of their respective masters or mistresses, in case they should stand in need of relief and support; notwithstanding any manumission or instrument of freedom to them made and given; and shall be liable at all times to be put forth to service by the justices of the peace or wardens of the town. [110]

"Mulattoes and negroes" were now legally defined not only as slaves, but slave like even as free people. This was also the second time that colonial officials used the term "mulatto," which suggest that enslaved women were having children by white men. Furthermore, it also suggests that some white men were freeing their enslaved children. This was problematic in a society that supported and protected race–based slavery; free people of color were anomalies in this system of slavery.

The governing bodies of the colony acknowledged, accepted and protected race-based slavery. They also required all whites to assist in the regulation of slavery. Moreover, race-based slavery "benefited" all white Rhode Islanders. The duties and taxes collected on the purchase and sale of enslaved people provided funds for public works. The streets of Newport were paved, its bridges and country roads mended through the duties collected on slave imports. The institution of slavery literally built Rhode Island.[111]

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[110] The Rhode Island General Assembly passed a 1728 Act requiring a £100 bound for manumitted slaves. Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. V 1741-1756,* 415.

[111]Every captain, merchant, person or persons bringing in "negro" slave(s) from other colonies were charged £3 per head. The 1715 law assessing duties on Negro slaves imported into the colony. Legislation in 1717, 1719 and 1723 exclusively set aside slave duties for public works. In 1723 the 1711 duty on Negro slaves was repealed. The act did not penalize direct imports from Africa because the colonial government did not want to hinder the slave trade. Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. V 1741-1756* 190-193, 225, 330, 424.

The legalization of slavery in Rhode Island does not fit into either of the processes of the legalization of slavery that dominated the origins and development of slavery in the British North American colonies. Unlike their northern and southern counterparts whom initially, formally, and specifically restricted the institution of slavery first to American Indian then to people of African descent, Rhode Island lawmakers simply acknowledged what had become common practice. Scholarship concerning the northern and middle colonies lay out a gradual and systematic evolution of slavery in which Africans were always eligible for slavery.[112] The origins of the institution of slavery in Rhode Island was similar to, but distinct from slavery in the northern and middle colonies which necessitate comparisons to Massachusetts, New York and Virginia. The economic development of Rhode Island closely resembled that of Massachusetts. New York was the other northern colony with similar percentages of its population enslaved. And like Virginians, Rhode Islanders were invested in agricultural slavery.

Slave law in Virginia, Massachusetts and New York evolved steadily. In all three colonies, legislators slowly, but steadily passed laws to allow for the enslavement of Africans. And, then they passed a series of specific laws to restrict the rights of slaves. For example, In 1704, the Honorable General Assembly Court of Massachusetts officially ruled that children born to slave mothers were indeed slaves; therefore, they were bought and sold as chattel.[113] The Assembly also passed several laws restricting the rights of all Africans (most of whom were enslaved). Emancipation was restricted, a curfew was imposed, interracial sex was banned, and severe punishments were issued for striking Christians (who were by default white).[114] Similarly, in 1679, the English

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[112] See Berlin, *Many Thousand Gone*.

[113] As stated in the Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641) 91st Article. *Old South Leaflets* (Boston: Directors of the Old South Work, 1896-1922), 24-26.

[114] Ibid., 53-61

Governor of New York "ruled that enslaving local American Indians was illegal, but holding blacks in bondage was permissible."[115] In 1683, the New York City Common Council restricted the movements and gatherings slaves. Colonial law also prohibited slaves from leaving home without permission, possessing weapons, gathering in groups of four or more, and forbade free residents from entertaining or participating in commerce with them.[116] In 1706, the New York General Assembly declared only "Negroes" could be slaves. [117] On the other hand, Rhode Island colonial officials first outlawed African slavery, but ultimately sanctioned the institution. Like most New Englanders, Rhode Island slaveholders shifted from American Indian to African slavery; however, unlike any other New Englanders, they initially forbade the enslavement of both Africans and American Indians. Nevertheless, like Virginians, Rhode Island government officials passed legislation that supported their economic endeavors. For example, Virginians methodically instituted a race-based hereditary system of slavery as their plantation economy matured.[118] Like Virginians, Rhode Island government officials created slave laws that fit their economic interests. As the businesses of slavery became increasingly important to the colony, Rhode Island lawmakers passed legislation that acknowledged and protected race-based slavery.

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[115] Ibid., 37.

[116] Lelsie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 33.

[117] Ibid., 26-28.

[118] A series of laws reveals the development of the institution of slavery in Virginia. In 1662 children inherited the status of their mothers; in 1670 blacks and Indians were forbidden to hold slaves; in 1680 thirty lashes were given to any black lifting a hand against any Christian; in 1691 any white who married a black was banished from the colony and white women who had affairs and, or children with black men were fined or indentured; if they were already indentured their contracts were extended. A systematic slave code developed in colonial Virginia. Virginians increasingly preferred on African slave labor, because unlike white indentured servants they were bound for life. See Morgan, *American Slavery.*

Early slave law in Rhode Island attached blackness to the institution of slavery and required whites to assist in the regulation of enslaved black and American Indians. Both American Indians and blacks were enslaved in early Rhode Island; however, white Rhode Islanders quickly committed to black slavery as they deemed American Indians as unfit residents of colonial settlements. Consequently, slave law in Rhode Island became directed at people of African descent. Black and slave became synonyms in this period, and as slavery was understood to be the ultimate form of dependency so too was blackness. Slave law also required action and obedience from white Rhode Islanders regardless of whether or not they owned a slave. The 1708 law restricted whites from socializing with and/or entertaining black slaves and Indian servants; in 1714 the colonial government specifically denoted what type (race) of slaves whites could bring into the colony. In 1715, white ferrymen became responsible for verifying the status of blacks and Indians. Finally in 1720, colonial officials prohibited slave owners from freeing their slaves through attaching a fee to manumission. The lives of all white Rhode Islanders were shaped by the institution of slavery and the racial ideology it created.

The Shift from American Indian to Black Slavery in Rhode Island, 1636-1750

The first slaves, with English masters, in Rhode Island were American Indians. The slave experience for American Indians was shaped by war, defeat, capture and displacement. Throughout British North America, colonists commonly enslaved Indians during the first decades of settlement. In fact, prior to the eighteenth century, most slaves were American Indians, not Africans. Historian Margaret Newell, reminds scholars that "New England armies, courts, and magistrates enslaved more than 1200 Indian men, women and children in the seventeenth century alone."[119] American Indian slave labor

[119] Margaret Newell, "The Changing Nature of Indian Slavery in New England," 107.

constituted a substantial, and sometimes the sole source of forced labor in North America.[120]

The Pequot, a local indigenous group, were first enslaved by Europeans the same year that Rhode Island was founded.[121] The Pequot War (1636-37) allowed for the establishment of English hegemony in southern New England and has been described as "one of the most important events in early American history."[122] The Puritans attacked the Pequot after they failed to turn over two of their members accused of murdering English colonists. Contemporary Puritan writers freely admitted their attack was punitive. They deliberately intended to cause the maximum number of casualties. In a surprise attack, they torched homes and executed the men in front of their families. Some of the men were branded and sold to the British West Indies. A few white Rhode Islanders were critical of this trade. In a letter to John Winthrop, founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Roger Williams (founder of Providence) plead on behalf of the Pequots:

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[120] See Margaret Newell, "The Changing Nature of Indian Slavery in New England," in *Reinterpreting New England Indians and the Colonial Experience* ed. Colin G. Calloway and Neal Salisbury (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2003).

[121] Prior to European contact, the Pequot lived in semi-permanent village settlements. They cultivated corn, beans, squash and tubers; they supplemented their diet through hunting, gathering and fishing. The Pequot lived in a parilineal society. Their social structure was made of family lineages, clans and strictly adhered to social deference. The Pequot were closely related, culturally and linguistically, to the Algonquian people of Southern New England. The Pequot territories were adjacent to Algonquian lands. William Starna, "The Pequots in the Early Seventeenth Century," in *The Pequots in Southern New England*: *the Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation*, ed. Laurence M. Hauptman and James D. Wherry (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1990), 33-40.

[122] Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 1.

> I understand it would be very greatefvll to our neighbors that such Pequts as fall to them be not enslaved, like those which our taken in war; but be used kindly, have houses and good and fields given them: because they voluntarily choose to come in to them, & if not receaved will go to the enemie or turne wild Irish themselves: but of this more as I shall understand.[123]

American Indian men were often sold out of their respective regions because they were viewed as difficult to manage in their native land. Captured American Indian women and children, on the other hand, were sold locally as house slaves.[124] For American Indian slaves in New England slavery either resulted in expulsion form one's homeland or subjugation to their enemies.

Less than thirty years later, Metacom's war (1675-1676) cemented English hegemony and led to the enslavement of significant numbers of American Indians, especially in Rhode Island.[125] Metacom was the first Wampanoag leader to abandon diplomatic talks with English colonists.[126] Persistent English encroachment on the political and physical autonomy of the Wampanoag, combined with the questionable death of a Sassamon (a diplomat), led Metacom to abandon diplomatic avenues in favor of war. He forged an alliance with several New England Native communities to drive out the English. He was unsuccessful in uniting all the Native communities due largely to

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[123] Moore argues that such letters indicate the beginning of the Colonial Slave Trade. George Moore, *Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968) 2.

[124] In 1646, the Commissioners of the United Colonies authorized the exchange of Indians for African slaves. Historian George Moore correctly designates this period as the beginning of the European directed domestic slave trade in the North American colonies. The first North American slave trade overlapped the initial settlement period of Rhode Island. Ibid., 32.

[125] Metacom's war was a debilitating defeat for the Narragansett and the large number of captives led to slave trade between white New Englanders and South Carolinians—the first European controlled domestic slave trade. Colonists from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York all bought American Indian slaves from South Carolina. Their number is unknown. The war transformed New England Indians into dependents. See Drake, *King Phillip's: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1999).

[126] Metacom was also known as Phillip or King Phillip.

past rivalries, cultural divides, and existing alliances with colonists. The war extended as far north as New Hampshire and as far south as Connecticut; it was the bloodiest war the continent had ever seen. One in ten soldiers on both sides were killed or injured. The war raged until Metacom was killed by a Wampanoag group fighting with the English. Metacom's War destroyed much of the political and economic strength of the Narragansett people.[127]

During and after this conflict, American Indian war captives were again sold out of the colony; however, many of their destitute brothers and sisters entered into indenture contracts with local whites. Some of the contracts bound American Indians for decades—they were essentially enslaved for life. Enslavement for debt or criminality was rare prior to 1675, because intact tribes had the resources and political power to pay fines and hire white patrons to represent them in court. However, following the war American Indians were particularly vulnerable to servitude, because they could not afford to pay goods or cash to avoid bondage as punishment for petty crimes. Rhode Islanders were the leading employers of bound American Indian labor in the northern colonies.[128] Several references to American Indian slaves appeared in Rhode Island's legislative and colonial records after 1675, and ads for runaway Indian slaves were common throughout the colonial period.[129] Colonial courts also heard criminal cases involving enslaved American Indian perpetrators. In 1712 John Sloclum, an American Indian who belonged to Giles Sloclum reportedly murdered his master's two small sons. He was publicly hung

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[127] See Drake, *King Phillip's War*.

[128] John A. Sainsbury, "Indian Labor in Early Rhode Island," in *New England Encounters: Indians and Euromericans 1600-1850,* ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999), 262.

[129] Ibid., 263-9. See Maureen Alice Taylor and John Wood Sweet eds. Runaways, Deserters, and Notorious Villains: From Rhode Island Newspapers Volume 2: Additional notices from the Providence Gazette, 1762 – 1800 as well as advertisements from all other Rhode Island Newspapers from 1732 – 1800 (Rockport: Picton Press, 2001).

in Newport.[130] In 1727, an American Indian named Peter, who belonged to Jacob Mott, was found guilty of attempted murder. According to the records he "maliciously endeavor to murder his said master, by discharging at him a gun, loaded with a bullet and sundry shot, shooting him through the hat, so that I was an extraordinary act of Providence, said Mott was not killed." For his crimes Peter was branded with an R on his forehead and whipped through the streets of Newport.[131]

Although, American Indian slavery thrived in the seventeenth century throughout New England, especially in Rhode Island, nearly all northern colonies eventually prohibited the importation of American Indians, free or enslaved by 1720.[132] Most colonies passed non-importation laws and restricted the sale of local Indians out of their prospective colonies.[133] As conflicts with American Indians increased, colonists favored societies where Indians did not exist at all, even as slaves and servants. American Indians were viewed as a dangerous population; they were difficult to control and keep in bondage. Simply put, they knew the land better than the colonists, making successful escapes a distinct possibility. By 1712, an act was passed in Massachusetts which forbade the importation of any additional American Indian servants. Colonists increasingly viewed Indian slaves as undesirable residents regardless of their status; the 1712 act characterized them as malicious, vengeful, rude, insolent and ungovernable.[134] Legislators in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, and Connecticut all passed similar acts. Consequently, they turned to enslaved African—which they had increasing

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[130] Edward West, *Portsmouth, Rhode Island, before 1800*. (Providence: J. Green, 1936).

[131] Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. V 1741-1756*, 389.

[132] Moore, *Notes*, 52-61.

[133] See Newell, "The Changing Nature of Indian Slavery in New England."

[134] Moore, *Notes*, 52-61.

access to as a result of Rhode Islanders' entering the Atlantic slave trade. The institution of slavery in Rhode Island began as system of bondage for captured and impoverished American Indians, but flourished as structure committed to black bondage. White Rhode Islanders had replaced a familiar "dangerous" population with black "strangers."

White Rhode Islanders began purchasing slaves from Barbados in the last decade of the seventeenth century; colonists purchased twenty to thirty slaves per year. Most of the slaves had been in Barbados for over a year. They could speak and understand some English, and many of them performed skilled labor. Regardless of when and where Africans slaves were first used in Rhode Island they became the slaves of "choice." White Rhode Islanders committed to African slavery just as they had committed to Atlantic commerce. In the eighteenth century, Rhode Islanders began importing slaves directly from Africa, as local traders began making regular voyages to the continent. The first documented evidence of Rhode Islanders importing slaves directly from Africa was in 1696 when fourteen Africans of a "cargo" of 47 were purchased, for £30 to £35 each, from the *Seaflower* in Newport.[135] Most African slaves were sold at auction houses in bustling seaport city of Newport. There were slave markets at the corner of Mill and Spring Street as well as North Baptist and Thames Street.[136] While many of the slaves were sold to Newport merchants and tradesmen, a significant numbers were sold to Narragansett farmers. By the mid-eighteenth century, nearly 70% of the slave population was concentrated in seven towns and cities (table 3). The slave population was heavily concentrated in Newport and the Narragansett (South Kingston, North Kingston, Charlestown). In fact, in Rhode Island slaves were just a likely to labor on farms as they

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[135] Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. V 1741-1756*, 54

[136] Slave markets were located on the corner of Mill and Spring; North Baptist and Thames. Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen*, 11.

were to labor in cities, which was unusual in the North where the slave population was largely urban.

Table 3: Percentage of the total population enslaved in seven Rhode Island cities, 1755

Cities or Towns	Percentage of total population enslaved
Newport	26%
South Kingston (Narragansett)	11%
Charlestown	9%
North Kingstown	6%
Providence	6%
Tiverton	5%
Warwick	5%

Source: This table was complied from published census data. McManus', *Black Bondage*, 202-204

Unfortunately there are very few sources, especially archival, that reveal the day-to-day experiences of urban slaves in the first half of the eighteenth century. However, demographic data and court records allow reasonable conjuncture about their daily lives. For example, most Newport slaves were owned by merchants, tradesmen and distillers, during this period.[137] These trends suggest that they most likely assisted their masters in their homes and various businesses. In Newport, female slaves labored primarily as domestic servants, while men labored in local industry (candle making and rum distilleries), husbandry, building and metal trades, sailing, whaling and manual labor (wharf warehousing).[138] Rhode Island slaves, like slaves throughout the urban North, were usually one of few bound labor in a household; consequently, they lived fairly solitary lodged in the attics, garrets or kitchens.[139] The wills of slaveholders allow a glimpse into the daily activities of enslaved Rhode Islanders. For example, Hannah a "neagro woman" owned by Caleb Carr of Newport, a landowning farmer, was bequeathed to Carr's wife Sarah. He also left Sarah the dwelling house with privileges in the yard for wood and use of the lower garden. It stands to reason that Hannah was to tend the garden, fetch water and cut wood for her mistress.[140] Elizabeth Carr, a propertied woman in Newport, left her grandson one of her "negroes," of his choosing along with all her land, houses and all her jewels. However, she left her daughter the remainder of her "goods and chattels." The will does not reveal exactly how many slaves Carr owned, although she clearly owned three or more slaves. She allowed her grandson

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[137] See Crane, *A dependent people*.

[138] Richard Youngken, *African Americans in Newport*, 11.

[139] Most slaveholders in Newport owned just one or two slaves; however, there were notable exceptions. In 1730 Edward Smith willed his wife and children a total of eight enslaved woman and children. The Will of Edward Smith, Newport, Rhode Island, 1730. Fiske, *Gleaning from Newport Courtfile*,# 1014.

[140] The Will of Caleb Carr, Newport, Rhode Island, March 8, 1693/4. Ibid., #12.

to choose which slave he wanted, and left her daughter at least two other slaves. [141] Raney, a "negro girl," was bequeathed by Captain Peter Green of Warwick, a yeoman, to his daughter Sarah Arnold. Hager, a "negro woman" and her children were willed to Green's wife.[142] These wills highlight the challenges enslaved people faced as inheritable and contested property. The death of their masters meant that they had to contend with the uncertain demands of a new master, settle into a new residence and possibly leave behind loved ones.

Court records also reveal early resistance to the institution of slavery. In 1714, Thomas Peckham of Newport, a house carpenter, sued John Scott of Newport, also a house carpenter, for non-payment of expenses accrued in attempting to recover a runaway mulatto man.[143] In 1728, Jethro an enslaved "negro," stole a canoe from his master Robert Wilcox a yeoman of Kingstown and paddled to Martha's Vineyard and "hid among the Indians." According to Samuel Swan of Newport, a glover by trade, Wilcox hired him to go after Jethro, but refused to pay his "sundry expenses" of £28:3:5.[144] These cases demonstrate how enslaved people resisted enslavement colonial Rhode Island as well as the difficulties slaveholders had in recovery their human property.

The Narragansett was home to thousands of black slaves in the eighteenth century. Located along the southeastern coast and southern Islands, the Narragansett was

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[141] The Will of Elizabeth Carr, Newport, Rhode Island, March 22, 1721/2. Ibid., # 141.

[142] The Will of Captain Peter Green, Newport, Rhode Island, July 28, 1725. Ibid., #243.

[143] Thomas Peckham vs. John Scott, Newport, Rhode Island, December 1714. Ibid., # 40.

[144] Samuel Swan vs. Robert Wilcox, Newport, Rhode Island, March 24 1728/9. Ibid., #463.

ideal for small scale agriculture.[145] Slaves were usually one of at least four or five bound laborers which often included indentured servants. The Narragansett was first cleared and farmed by American Indians. However, between 1720 and 1750, the region became home to 20 to 30 settler families and their bondsmen and women. Most of the families had purchased large tracts of land (from war ravaged destitute Narragansett peoples) in the 1690s. The large landowners owned anywhere from four to twenty slaves. Average slaveholdings were four per family—double the northern average.[146] These farmers bred horses, cattle and sheep. Female slaves manufactured dairy products, while male slaves cared for livestock. Both men and women cultivated small amounts of Indian corn, rye, hemp flax and tobacco.[147]

Conclusion

The origins and development of slave trading and slaveholding in Rhode Island reveal that the institution of slavery was anything but peripheral to the development of this northern colony. The case of Rhode Island exposes how businesses of slavery—the buying and selling of slaves and maintenance of slave societies—were central to the development and stability of this northern colony. However, white Rhode Islanders were unique in the North because of their extensive and multiple ties to the institution. Consequently, as the institution of slavery became increasingly important to the local economy, Rhode Island lawmakers passed legislation to promote and protect it.

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[145] William Davis Miller, *The Narragansett Planters* (Worchester: The Society, 1934), 4.

[146] In 1730, Robert Robinson reported owning nine slaves; in 1738, George Hazard owned five slaves, and in 1750 Governor Robinson owned 20 slaves (one slave was reportedly worth £500). Robert K Fitts, *Inventing New England's Slave Paradise: Master/Slave Relations in Eighteenth Century Narragansett, Rhode Island* (New York: Garland Publishing: 1998) , 113.

Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen*, 10.

[147] Miller, *The Narragansett Planters*, 20-41.

Slaveholding was legal and socially acceptable practice in colonial Rhode Island. Atlantic commerce, especially slave trading and supplying the West Indies with food and goods, helped transform Rhode Island into a distinct, cohesive and viable colony. White Rhode Islanders replaced American Indian slaves with African slaves as they became increasingly committed to the Atlantic slave trade. Moreover, the increase in slaveholding in Rhode Island paralleled increased participation in the Atlantic slave trade. By 1750, Rhode Islanders were committed to black bondage and intimately and profitability involved in the businesses of slavery.

CHAPTER 2

RACE-BASED SLAVERY AND THE BUSINESSES OF SLAVERY IN COLONIAL RHODE ISLAND, 1720-1770

By the middle of the eighteenth century race-based slavery was a part of everyday life in Rhode Island. Enslaved people labored in the cities and the countryside. Their behavior and status was legislated; and they were routinely willed and sold for debt. White Rhode Islanders' commitment to race-based slavery bolstered their intense economic investment in the businesses of slavery in the decades preceding the American Revolution. The growth of the enslaved population in Newport and the Narragansett allowed white Rhode Islanders (especially merchants and farmers) to further invest in the businesses of slavery.[148] Farmers in the Narragansett put thousands of slaves to work on their large farms. Merchants and tradesmen in Newport put their slaves to work in their homes, shops and on their ships. White Rhode Islanders who did not own slaves hired out slave labor. Slave labor therefore played a key role in the growth of commerce in Rhode Island, while the West Indian and the Atlantic slave trades provided farmers and merchants with a market for their slave produced goods. The slave trade also gave them access to molasses which was used to make rum Rhode Island's number one export. In turn, slave traders used rum to purchase slaves and merchants used rum to barter for goods from other colonies.

Northern colonists, New Englanders in particular, were invested in both the West Indian and the Atlantic slave trades; however, Rhode Islanders were the most deeply

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[148] Rhode Island's history offers strong support for Joanne Pope Melish's contention that slave labor allowed white men to pursue entrepreneurial businesses. Melish argues that slave labor freed white men to pursue other economic interest. Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England: 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

entrenched.[149] The economic history of Rhode Island reveals how northern colonies were part of, not apart from, the practices and institution of slavery.[150] Rhode Island's history of slavery can also contribute to a long standing scholarly debate concerning how the institution of slavery shaped social and racial ideologies. Historian Eugene Genovese once argued that "mastery" was a fundamental part of the southern experience.[151] The use of black slave labor and investments in the thriving businesses of slavery shaped northern whites belief in their own racial superiority. Northerners relied on an economic system that promoted a white master class. Finally, Rhode Island's history of slavery points to the necessity of a national history of slavery, one which exposes the North's participation and investment in both the practices and the business of racialized slavery.

The West Indian trade and the Atlantic slave trade were central to the daily lives of enslaved people in Rhode Island. In 1755, slaves accounted for 31% and 23% of the total populations of the Narragansett and Newport, respectively.[152] This significant

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[149] Historian Bernard Bailyn argues that "the key dynamic force" in New England's economic success was slavery. I argue this was especially true in Rhode Island. It was the business of slavery that allowed New England to become an economic powerhouse without ever producing a staple crop. Economist Gavin Wright asserts that in recent decades historians and economists have "rediscovered both the centrality of African slavery for the eighteenth-century expansion of commerce known as the Rise of the Atlantic Economy, and the importance of overseas markets for the industrial and technological breakthroughs known as the Industrial revolution." The rise of the business of slavery in Rhode supports Wright's contention. Bernard Bailyn, "Slavery and Population Growth in Colonial New England," in *Engines of Enterprise An Economic History of New England*, ed. Peter Temin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 254-255. Gavin Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 14.

[150] By 1775 nearly 80% of the exports of New England went to the British West Indies. In fact the West Indian planters were so dependent on provisions from the Northern colonies that famine broke out during the American Revolution when ships could not get there. An estimated 15,000 slaves in Jamaica died of hunger between 1780 and 1787. Anne Farrow et al., *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited From Slavery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), 49-50.

[151] See Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974).

[152] Edgar McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 203.

population density was dictated by the requirements of the business of slavery. Slaveholders in the Narragansett needed relatively large slaveholdings to produce foodstuffs for trade with West Indian planters. Merchants and tradesmen in Newport used their slaves as perpetual assistants, which allowed them to expand their businesses.

In 1720, there were an estimated 543 slaves in the colony; by 1750 that number had increased more than six fold to 3,347.[153] This boom in the slave population directly paralleled the colony's increased participation in the Atlantic slave trade. However, between 1750 and 1770 the number of slaves in Rhode Island remained relatively stable, while the white population more than doubled. Consequently, slaves who made up of 10% of the total population in 1750 (3,347), made up just 6% of the population in 1770 (3,761).[154] The slave population in Rhode Island had reached a critical mass by 1750. There was no more room for Narragansett farmers to expand their operations, and the city of Newport was being bombarded with new white colonists who did not have resources to purchase slaves. Consequently, Rhode Island's slave population leveled out in 1750.

Merchants, Slave Traders, Manufactures and the West Indian Trade

In eighteenth century Rhode Island, merchants were slave owners, slave traders, manufacturers, brokers and bankers; these identities overlapped were often intertwined. However, all of these occupations were tied a much larger and sophisticated economic system—which scholars refer to as the Atlantic Plantation Complex. The Atlantic Plantation Complex was an unprecedented international economic system. The first plantations emerged in the Mediterranean in the eleventh century were, moved to West African Islands in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, shifted to South America and the

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153 Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: the first two centuries of slavery in North America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 369.

154 Ibid., 369.

Caribbean in the sixteenth century, and finally emerged in North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[155] These plantations had several distinct characteristics. They had a large labor force (usually 50 or more) with managers and supervisors who had the right punish and control the movement of the laborers. The vast majority of the laborers were bound or enslaved, and lived in conditions not conducive to reproduction. These plantations produced crops (most commonly sugar) for a distant market. Finally, the financing and political control over the plantations lay in another continent and society.[156] By the mid-eighteenth century, white Rhode Islanders were intimately involved in this system; they were supplying the sugar plantations of the West Indies with slaves, livestock, dairy products, fish, candles and lumber. In return they received molasses which they distilled into rum. White Rhode Islanders created a niche for themselves in the plantation complex as suppliers and importers.

A key component of the plantation complex was a bilateral trade between New Englanders and colonists in the West Indies. This trade began in the late seventeenth century, but flourished after 1730, when rum became the Rhode Island's number one export.[157] The West Indian trade propelled Newport out of Boston's shadows and into the status of a major city; it also helped to establish Providence as a major port city.[158] While most Rhode Island merchants were engaged in inter-colonial trading, their primary trading good was rum which they made from West Indian molasses. The sugar islands reserved little land for subsistence agriculture or industry; therefore, they imported nearly

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[155] See Phillip Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of Plantation Complex: Essays on Atlantic History* (New York: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1998).

[156] See Herbert Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[157] See Paul Weiler, *Rhode Island---West Indies Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Manuscript Thesis, University of Iowa August, 1947).

[158] See Lynne Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island: Newport and Providence in the 18th Century*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

everything they ate, wore and constructed. Rhode Islanders may have occupied the smallest land mass among the British colonies, and lacked a staple crop, but they became exporters and their primary foreign (outside of North America) markets were in the French and British West Indies. So while the West Indies may not have been dependent on Rhode Islanders, Rhode Islanders were dependent on the West Indies. Furthermore, this bilateral trade must be understood as part of a larger system. The trade between Rhode Island and the sugar islands benefited farmers, merchants, tradesmen and plantation owners. This trade was essential to Rhode Island's commercial revolution.[159] The demands of the Atlantic economy helped create a capitalistic merchant class in the northern British North American colonies. Moreover, the Atlantic economy was dependent on the collective activities of northern colonies such as Rhode Island to provide slaves, food, clothing and goods to plantation societies.

The most important "commodities" of the plantation complex were slaves, and Rhode Islanders were the leading slave traders in British North America. The Atlantic slave trade, a key component of the plantation complex after the seventeenth century, was a complex and extraordinary movement of peoples and capital. While European states were the essential organizing body of the trade, Africans were the principle sellers, and private investors from Europe, the Americas and Africa provided the financing. From 1650 to 1850, an estimated ten to fifteen million Africans were transported to the "New World." The continental British North American colonies, later the United States, received less than 5% of slaves transported; the majority of slaves were shipped to the West Indies and South America.[160]

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[159] Like economist Gavin Wright I assert that African slavery—the business of slavery in particular—was central to Commercial Revolution, which laid much of the foundation for the Industrial Revolution. Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development,* 14-15.

[160] See John Thornton, *African and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Rhode Island slave traders were major players within the North American context. Throughout the eighteenth century, Rhode Island merchants controlled over 60% of the American trade in African slaves.[161] The outfitting of even the smallest sloop took three to four months, and required a small army of tradesmen, including carpenters, joiners, painters, caulkers, sailmakers, riggers and sailors. African voyages also required additional crew to control and manage the human cargo. For example, the sloop *Adventure*, which was owned by Christopher and George Champlin, sailed out of Newport in 1773 with 11 men, which was twice the number of men needed for a sloop bound for commodities trade with other colonies or England.[162] Furthermore, the bulk of their departing cargo was made up of local products. The *Adventure* was outfitted with handcuffs and shackles for a 21 foot boat, 26 gallons of vinegar, pork, beef, sugar, molasses, wine, beans, tobacco, butter, bread and flour. But, the vast majority of the cargo space was reserved for locally distilled rum. The *Adventure* carried 24,380 gallons of rum, which was enough to purchase several dozen slaves. Slave women cost an average of 190 gallons and men averaged 220 gallons. The *Adventure* reached Africa in five weeks. It took the captain four months of cruising to acquire 62 slaves, along with rice, pepper, palm oil and gold dust. Fifty-eight slaves survived and they were sold in Grenada for £35 to £39. The Champlin brothers received a 5% return on their investment.[163] Such voyages were common in Rhode Island (table 4).

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[161] Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press: 1981), 25. Farrow, *Complicity*, 95-119. The New England trade with the West Indies simulated local economies especially the shipping industry. Farrow, *Complicity*, 53-54.

[162] The sloop was owned by Christopher (majority owner) and George Champlin. The Champlin family owned a large estate in the Narragansett, but they were also involved in commerce—slave trading in particular.

[163] The article is based on the original manuscript in the library of George L. Shepley, with Notes and Introduction by Professor Verner W. Crane of Brown University. Verner W. Crane, "A Rhode Island Slaver: Trade Book of The Sloop Adventure, 1773-1774" (1922), Shepley Library (Providence, Rhode Island).

Table 4: Number of Slaves Transported by British North American Ships to the colonies, 1750-1775

	1751-1755	1756-1760	1761-1765	1766-1770	1771-1775
Rhode Island (number of voyages)	6,007 (55)	4,884 (59)	8,894 (82)	9,168 (83)	12,628 (104)
Non-RI New England	522 (5)	653 (5)	3,257 (25)	2,369 (17)	4,684 (30)
PA, DE, NJ	0	0	141 (2)	105 (1)	0
New York	136 (3)	1,321 (11)	1,861 (14)	0	0
Carolinas	334 (3)	572 (5)	574 (3)	65 (1)	650 (5)
Virginia	137 (1)	0	0	0	530 (1)

Source: David Eltis, et. al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade A Database on CD-ROM [CD-ROM]]* (Cambridge University Press, 1999)

Rhode Island's slave traders transported more slaves than the other British North American colonies combined (table 4). During the colonial period Rhode Islanders sent 507 slave ships to the coast of West Africa, while the rest of the New England colonists sent just 122 ships. New York colonists sent a mere 70 ships.[164] Rhode Island's dominance occurred before the American Revolution; over 42% of Rhode Islanders' traffic in slaves occurred in a twenty five year period, 1751-1775.[165] Not only were Rhode Islanders dominating the pre-revolutionary trade in slaves, they sold a third of their human cargo to their neighbors. The slave trade and its by-products were absolutely essential to the economic welfare of Rhode Island. [166]

The Rhode Island slave trade was particularly important to the economic development and stability of Newport.[167] The city was unique from other northern port cities because of its direct involvement in the Atlantic slave trade.[168] Rhode Island merchants were the essential middle men. They collected cargo from all who would sell, and redirected them to whoever would buy from Africa, the West Indies, London, and other British North American colonial ports.[169] The African slave trade sparked numerous secondary and subsidiaries industries that employed the majority of Newport's residents. For example, by 1764, there were 31 distilleries in Rhode Island, 18 in

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[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Elaine Crane, *A Dependent People: Newport, Rhode Island in the Revolutionary Era* (New York: Fordham University, 1985), 10.

[168] Richard C. Youngken, *African Americans in Newport: An Introduction to the Heritage of African Americans in Newport, Rhode Island, 1700-1945* (Newport: Newport Historical Society, 1998) , 4.

[169] See Crane, *A Dependent People*.

Newport alone.[170] Almost every occupation in Newport had a connection to slave trading. Seafaring provided employment for sailors and tradesmen, including caulkers, sail makers, and painters. Stevedores and team drivers loaded and unloaded ships. Coopers made barrels for rum. Fishermen and farmers provided foodstuffs for the both the Atlantic Slave and West Indian trades. Clerks, scribes, and warehouse overseers conducted the business of the trade. The business activities of merchants also served to fill the city coffers. Merchants, many of whom were slave traders, provided critical tax contributions to the city of Newport.[171] Slave trading was a crucial social and economic component of life in Rhode Island. While the slave trade was a marginal in other northern colonies, it was essential in Rhode Island.

The diverse business interests of two Rhode Island families, the famed Browns of Providence and the Lopez-Rivera family of Newport, exemplify how Rhode Island merchants created wealth in a colony that lacked the land mass and soil to support a staple crop. The Browns first came to Rhode Island in 1638 when Chad Brown, his wife Elizabeth and their son John moved from Salem, Massachusetts to Providence. Chad Brown was a surveyor; his son John followed in his footsteps. On reaching adulthood, John Brown had seven children and his son James Brown, born in 1666, was the first Brown to dapple in mercantile trade. His experimentation led to nearly six generations of Brown merchants. His sons James (II) and Obadiah were the first Browns to actively engage in Atlantic trading. In 1721, 23 year old James (II) set sail for the Leeward Islands in the West Indies as a captain of the sloop *Four Bachelors*, which he owned with four other men from Providence. The profitable voyage allowed James to open a shop in Providence. He sailed for the second and last time in 1727 as the master of the sloop

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[170] Irving Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen: The Story of the Negro in Rhode Island* (Providence: The Urban League of Greater Providence, 1954), 5 and Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol.VI 1757-1769*, 381.

[171] See Crane, *A Dependent People*, 54.

Truth and Delight, bound for Marinneco. James conducted business out of Providence and Newport; his stores provided Rhode Islanders with an array of everyday goods, such as salt, fish, beef, turnips, sugar, butter, lamb, mutton, iron pots, wood, cotton, linen, leather, looking glass, hoops for barrels, rum, wine and brandy. Most of theses goods were purchased from surrounding colonies with rum; however, cheese, pork, tobacco, and hoops for barrels were bartered for locally. His younger brother Obadiah worked for him as an agent and a ship captain from 1733 until 1739. Together, these two Brown brothers supplied planters in British and French sugar islands with corn, cheese, tar, horses, shingles and tobacco in exchange for molasses and cash.[172]

The Browns, however, were much more than successful merchants; they were also bankers. They routinely borrowed money from the colony and regularly extended lines of credit to Rhode Island residents.[173] Their familial history as civil servants and successful businessmen allowed them to occupy a unique position within the colony, as merchants and bankers.[174] James Brown died in 1739, but his wife Hope Power Brown continued running the family's private lending business. Hope was the granddaughter of one of the colony's original settlers, Pardon Tillinghast. Hope not only ran her husband's businesses after his death, but continued to borrow and loan money.[175] The family business helped to fuel the local economy.

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[172] James B. Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: The Colonial Years* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1968), 1-6.

[173] BFBR-Credit Instruments April 24, 1739-June 13, 1741 B 900 F.7. John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

[174] In 1735, they lent William Hopkins £95. They also lent large sums of money; in 1737 and 1738 Daniel Cook and Mathew Davis borrowed £441 and £526, respectively. BFBR-Credit Instruments Sept 24, 1704-April 24, 1739 B 900 F.6-8. John Carter Brown Library, Providence Rhode Island.

[175] In 1742, Hope Powers, borrowed £273 from the colony; a year later she lent Nicholas Powers £1650. BFBR-Credit Instruments July 19, 1742-Nov 13 1754 B 900 F.8. John Carter Brown Library, Providence Rhode Island.

After his brother's death, Obadiah continued to organize voyages and run the store. He also moved into the manufacturing business. In 1752, he opened a mill to process cocoa beans, a common trading good in the colonies. He also ran a distillery (rum) and built a spermaceti candle factory.[176] Obadiah, whose own sons died in childhood, trained his brother's sons in the family business. Thus, James Brown's sons James (b.1724), Nicholas (b.1729), Joseph (b. 1733), John (b.1736), and Moses (b.1738) all joined the family business. James (III) died in his twenties on a voyage to the Chesapeake. The surviving Brown brothers built a diverse business legacy.[177] Nicholas pursued a career in manufacturing—pig iron and cotton, as well as international (China) trading. Joseph managed the spermaceti candle factory. Moses often served as the supercargo, the officer on a merchant ship in charge of the commercial concerns of the voyage, for family-sponsored voyages. John dappled in all aspects of the family business and was by far the most audacious and ambitious. After Obadiah died in 1762, the four brothers continued running the families businesses under the name Nicholas Brown and Company. John withdrew from the company in 1771, although he retained an interest in the furnace and candle manufacturing business. Moses retired from the business in 1774, due largely to a conflict with his new Quaker beliefs. However, it is important to remember that the economic foundation of the Brown family was rooted in a business of slavery—supplying slave societies with necessities. It was that trade that launched the family's other businesses and allowed its sons to pursue their own diverse business interests. The Browns even dappled in the slave trade, although rather unsuccessfully. While their first voyage was profitable, all the other voyages were terrible failures. James Brown (II), sent the *Mary* to Africa in 1736; his voyage was successful. He not only profited from slave sales in the West Indies, he was able to bring back several slaves for

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[176] Hedges, *The Browns*, 8-9.

[177] Hedges, *The Browns*, 10-20.

the family. While the Browns regularly invested in slave voyages, the family did not send another ship until 1759. The ship, *Wheel of Fortune*, was captured by French privateers. In 1763, they commissioned another slave trading voyage on the *Sally*. The voyage was an absolute disaster. One hundred and eight of the one hundred and ninety six slaves died, and those slaves that survived were so sickly that they only sold for one tenth of the price of a healthy slave.[178] The Browns did not send another voyage until 1795. The family never ranked among the successful slave trading merchants in the Rhode Island, who were in fact, the most numerous and successful slave traders in British North America.

Aaron Lopez was among Rhode Island's most successful slave traders; Lopez was also one the most successful businessmen in eighteenth century Rhode Island. Between 1761 and 1774, he sent fourteen slave ships to the West coast of Africa. Lopez, a Sephardic Jew, came to Newport in 1752 and initially joined a candle making business with his brother Moses Lopez and uncle Jacob Rodriguez Rivera. They also brokered candles, coca, lime and molasses. Lopez married his cousin, and her father, his uncle, introduced him to the slave trading business.[179] In 1760, Lopez acquired half interest in father-in-law's brig *Grayhound*. A year later he sent his first voyage; his father-in-law, Jacob Rodriguez Rivera, held half interest, as he would for nearly every slave ship Lopez sent. Lopez's first voyage contained flour from Philadelphia, beef from New York and, most importantly, 15,281 gallons of rum from local distilleries.[180] Over a fourteen year

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[178] James Campbell, "Slavery and Justice Report of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice," 2006, <http://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/> (2006), 15-17.

[179] Stanley F. Chet, *Lopez of Newport: Colonial American Merchant Prince* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 24-30.

[180] Virginia Bever Platt, " 'And Don't Forget the Guinea Voyage': The Slave Trade of Aaron Lopez of Newport," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1975): 601-604.

period Lopez was responsible for transporting an estimated 1,116 slaves from West Africa to West Indies and the American South.

Table 5: Lopez-Rivera Slaving Voyages, 1761-1775

Name of Ship	**Captain**	**Date of Departure and Return**	**Ports where slaves were sold**
Grayhound	William Pinneger	Nov. 2, 1761 January 7, 1763	Charleston, South Carolina
Sloop Spry	William Pinneger	July 16, 1764 May 22, 1766	Barbados, Jamaica and NY
Brig Africa	Abraham All	May 3, 1765 July 11, 1766	Kingston
Sloop Betsey	Nathaniel Briggs	July 22, 1765 August 21, 1766	Kingston
Brig Sally	Nathaniel Briggs	August 21, 1766 July 1767	St. Kitts
Brig Africa	Abraham All	October 20, 1766 January 9, 1768	Kingston
Brig Hannah	Nathaniel Briggs	May 3, 1768 May 4, 1769	South Carolina and Barbados
Sloop Mary	William English	June 4, 1770 Spring 1771	Barbados
Ship Cleopatra	Nathaniel Briggs	July 1770 January 11, 1771	Barbados
Ship Cleopatra	Nathaniel Briggs	June 16, 1771 May 27, 1772	Barbados
Brigg Ann	William English	Nov. 27, 1772 Winter 1773	Kingston

Table 5: Continued

Ship Africa	Nathaniel Briggs	April 22, 1773 August 1774	Jamaica
Ship Cleopatra	James Bourk	June 30, 1773 August 1774	Jamaica
Brig Ann	William English	Spring 1774 March 1775	Jamaica

Source: This table was complied with scholarship published from historian Virginia Platt. Platt, “And Don’t Forget the Guinea Voyage,” 603 and 608

Lopez was also a slave owner; he owned five slaves and his father-in-law owned 12. Both Lopez and Rivera employed their slaves in candle making, specifically the rendering of whale head matter for spermaceti candles.[181] Between 1760 and 1776, Aaron Lopez sponsored over 200 voyages, although only a small fraction (14 or .07%) were slave trading voyages.[182] Although Lopez was much more involved in inter-colonial trade and trade with England, it was the West Indian trade that sustained it all because it provided him with molasses—the key ingredient for his number one trading good. The rum industry was an easy industry for Rhode Islanders to dominate because they had long established trading relationships with West Indian planters. Moreover, distilling rum did not take up a lot of land, which was in short supply in Rhode Island. The Atlantic slave and West Indian trades were absolutely critical to his overall success.

However, the slave trade was not without risk and dangers. Newport merchants John Channing and Walter Chaloner sued Henry Livingston, a merchant in Jamaica, for improperly disposing of "80 Negroes belonging to Channing and Chaloner."[183] Rhode Island slave traders often had to depend on third parties to sell their human "merchandise." In the spring of 1765, two Newport merchants, Samuel Vernon and William, gave Thomas Rogers, captain of their ship *Othello*, the following instructions:

> make a voyage from Newport to Cape Verd Islands then to the Windward Coast of Africa as high up as the Isle Delas or Sierrallon and so down to the Gold Coast Whiden and River Gaboon…trading at such places as you think most for our Advantage...proceed with your Slaves to Georgia or Charlestown in South Carolina where we shall lodge Letters for your further Proceedings…after stopping at Barbados for necessaries to refresh you slaves.

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[181] Newport merchants held a disproportionate number of slaves. Platt, "And Don't Forget the Guinea Voyage," 607. Crane, *A Dependent People*, 53-62.

[182] Platt, "And Don't Forget the Guinea Voyage," 616.

[183] The slaves were valued at £2470. John Channing and Walter Chaloner vs. Henry Livingston, Newport, Rhode Island, October 24, 1753. Jane Fletcher Fiske, *Gleanings from Newport Courtfile, 1659-1783*, (Boxford, 1998), # 845.

Rogers made the voyage. However, in route from Jamaica, the 70 slaves aboard the *Othello* somehow freed themselves and attempted to take over the ship. The slaves armed themselves with "billets of wood;" they "seized the master and held him while others beat and wounded him in very dangerous manner." Rogers "suffered a fractured scull." Rogers negotiated with the slaves for nearly two hours before he ordered his crew to "fire upon them." One slave was killed immediately; three were wounded and thirteen jumped overboard.[184]

Slaveholding merchants made their slaves available to those who could not afford to buy their own slaves. John Banister moved to Rhode Island in 1736, and married Hermoine Pelham, a granddaughter of Governor Benedict Arnold. Banister became a prominent Newport merchant; he traded primarily in the West Indies. Banister was a merchant, slave trader and auctioneer; he held one of the last public slave sales in Newport in 1752. He regularly mentioned his slaves, their work and expenses in his daybook. An examination of his daybook provides details of the centrality of slave labor to a merchants' day-to-day business.

Banister routinely hired out his slaves. On June 23, 1747, he received £4 for renting "Negro Mingo" and "Negro Toney" for outfitting the *Swan* for a voyage. He rented out his "Negro Anthony" 6 times in a two year period; he made a total of £34 and 12 shillings. Anthony was always rented out to help outfit trading ships, which suggests he was probably skilled in ship building. There is no evidence that Anthony worked for himself after hours or received any money from his labors, although urban slaves commonly received a small portion of their rent fees.[185] Bannister also hired slaves. On

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[184] Samuel Vernon and William Vernon vs. Thomas Rogers, Newport, Rhode Island, October 4, 1765. Fiske, *Gleanings from Newport Court Files*, #1070.

[185] John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 2003), 79.

October 12, 1748, he listed the costs of hiring "Negros Labour 3 days @ 18 s" for a total of £2 and 14 shillings. Banister also bought and sold slaves. On August 9, 1747 he bought a "Negro boy named Fortune" for £300 from the owners of the schooner *Success*, who had purchased the boy in Surinam. The following month Bannister sold Fortune, along with some tools, to Samuel Aborn in Connecticut for £350. He made a tidy profit in less than a month. On December 15, 1747, Banister bought a "Negro man named Cesar" from Captain Charles Bardin for £340 along with 107 gallons of molasses and 10 bushels of salt. On January 24, 1749, he bought "2 Negro men" in the Bay of Honduras through Captain William Warner for £800.[186] The diverse business activities of merchants like John Banister demonstrate how and why merchants were so crucial to the local economy. Men like Banister made slave labor available to their neighbors and business acquaintances. Moreover, they rented their slaves to the shipping trades—an essential component in the local economy.

The bilateral trade between Rhode Island and the West Indies was the foundation of all trading in Rhode Island. Rhode Island merchants fed West Indian slaves and filled the homes of their masters with everyday goods, such as candles. In return, they received molasses and cash, which they used to purchase goods from Rhode Island farmers and their colonial neighbors. They also distilled molasses into rum which they used to purchase slaves in West Africa. For Rhode Islanders this cyclical economy began and ended in the West Indies. Furthermore, the money they made through their trading activities funded additional entrepreneurial activities such as mills, distilleries and factories. Moreover, Rhode Island merchants acted as informal bankers. They borrowed from the colony and repaid their debts with interest, but more importantly, they lent money to local residents who in turn invested in the local economy.

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[186] John Banister, December 1746 through February 1750, "Daybook," Mss 919 vol. 1 pgs. 20, 111, 157, 331, 387, 477, 485, 479, 493, 512, 516, 527 and 528. Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

Rhode Island colonial officials revealed just how important the West Indian trade was to the colony through their formal response to the 1764 Sugar Act, which restricted their trade with the French sugar islands. They considered the sugar act "highly injurious and detrimental to all His Majesty's North American colonies in general, and to this colony in particular." Consequently, both the Governor and the colonial Company offered arguments against renewing the act. First they explained that the colony's 48,000 residents could not live off a territory of "about thirty miles square," the majority of which "is a barren soil, not worth the expense of cultivation." Moreover, they claimed that the colony hath no staple commodity for exportation, and could not raise provisions sufficient for its own consumption; yet, the of its harbors, and its convenient situation for trade agreeing with the spirit and industry of the people, hath in some measure supplied the deficiency of its natural produce, and provided the means of subsistence to its inhabitants.[187]

These men clearly believed that their economic success lay in trade, the West Indian trade in particular. Furthermore, they recognized that the goods they did export, such as, lumber, cheese and horses, were in demand in the West Indies and not in England. In fact, they argued that the West Indian market was the foundation of all their commerce. "As there is no commodity raised in the colony suitable for the European market, but a few article aforementioned; and as the other goods raised for exportation will answer at no market, but the West Indies, it necessarily follows that the trade thither must be the foundation of all our commerce."[188] Rhode Island officials argued that without free access to West Indian market, they would be unable to afford to purchase British goods. Between January of 1763, and January of 1764, 484 trading vessels left

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[187] John Russell Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. VI 1757-1769*, 379.

[188] Ibid.

Rhode Island. Three hundred of those vessels were engaged in costal trading (from Newfoundland to Georgia); the remaining 184 vessels were engaged in foreign trade, of which 150 were involved in trade with the West Indies. And from that trade with the West Indies, Rhode Islanders received about 14,000 hogsheads of molasses, of which only 2500 came from British islands. In other words, the West Indian trade with non-British islands was the foundation of their trade-based economy. Consequently, the Rhode Island Assembly declared, "without this trade, it would have been and always will be, utterly impossible for the inhabitants of this colony to subsist themselves, or to pay for any considerable quantity of British good." [189] Adherence to the Sugar Act would have decimated Rhode Island's merchant based economy.

Master and Slaves in Narragansett

Slaveholders in the Narragansett were both distinct from and similar to their counterparts in Newport and Providence. Narragansett farmers usually held twice as many slaves as their urban counterparts. However, like their urban equivalents, they relied on the West Indian market. The Narragansett, located along the southeastern coast of Rhode Island, was conducive to grazing large livestock and small scale agriculture. Its rich soil, moderate temperatures and easy access to Newport made it an ideal place for large farms.[190] In the Narragansett relatively large numbers of slaves cultivated foodstuffs for a distant market.

There was no single staple crop; most of the land was simply too steep and rocky to plant. Instead, farmers bred horses, cattle and sheep. They also manufactured dairy products, especially cheese, and cultivated small amounts of Indian corn, rye, hemp flax

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[189] Ibid., 379-380.

[190] Miller, *The Narragansett Planter*, *4.*

and tobacco. [191] Between 1720 and 1770, farmers in the Narragansett created a slave society.[192] Robert Hazard, a successful Narragansett farmer, owned seventeen acres and grazed dozens of sheep. His female slaves were in charge of the care of 12 cows each and were expected to make 12 different chesses daily.[193] Most Narragansett slaveholdings were relatively small compared to their southern counterparts, but large compared their northern neighbors. Regardless of the size of the slaveholding slave labor was essential to economic success in the Narragansett.[194]

Narragansett farmers were wealthy and profitable enough to model themes after the British gentry. They commissioned their own portraits, took long European vacations, and attempted to emulate the English countryside and manor homes. Like the south's wealthier planters, Narragansett farmers used intermarriage to consolidate their wealth. They also hired private tutors for their children and dominated local politics. These farmers rarely performed manual labor—slave labor allowed them the wealth and time to cultivate a life of leisure.[195] Local farmers controlled the social, political and economic realities of the region.[196] While neither their landholdings nor their slaveholdings were equal to that of wealthy southern planters, the operations of Narragansett farmers closely resembled plantations and they were definitely part of the Atlantic plantation

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[191] Ibid, 20-41.

[192] Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen*, 10.

[193] Ibid, 5.

[194] William D. Johnston, *Slavery in Rhode Island, 1755-1776* (Providence: The Society, 1894), 126.

[195] Fitts, *Inventing New England's Slave Paradise*, 121-140

[196] See Miller, *The Narragansett Planter* (Worcester, Massachusetts: The Society, 1934) and Fitts, *Inventing New England's Slave Paradise*.

complex.[197] Narragansett farmers marketed their agricultural goods, produced by slave labor, to distant and international markets.[198] Furthermore, the wealth they gained from participation in the Atlantic economy allowed them to dominate and direct their society.

The experience of slaves in the Narragansett also closely resembled that of their counterparts in the southern colonies. In Rhode Island, slaveholding was common, and anything but benign.

> I got up this morning early, and finding Hannibal had been out… I stript and gave him a few lashes till he begged. As Harry was untying him, my poor passionate dear (Mrs. MacSparran) saying I had not given him enough gave him a lash or two, upon which he ran. [199]

Hannibal, unlike most northern slaves, lived in a slave society. Between 1720 and 1774, a distinctive agrarian slave society had emerged in the Narragansett. This slave society was made up of large farms. In his 1934 study, historian William Davis Miller noted that, " the increase in the negro population of the Colony rose and fell, in ratio to its prosperity and the prosperity of the Narragansett Planters, who formed a very important part in its economic structure."[200] The Narragansett economy, which encompasses present day South Kingston, North Kingston, Wickford, Wakefield, Peacedale, and Charleston, was dependent on slave labor. By 1755 one out of every three residents of South County was a slave; and in Charleston blacks made up nearly 40% of the population (418 blacks and 712 whites).[201]

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[197] Most scholars of slavery in North America define a plantation as an agricultural estate worked by at least twenty bound laborers.

[198] See Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of Plantation Complex*.

[199] An excerpt taken the journal of Dr. James MacSparran, a prominent Espiscopal minister in Narragansett. Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen*, 15.

[200] Miller, *The Narragansett Planter*, 20.

[201] Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen*, 9.

The Narragansett had the highest concentration of blacks in New England throughout most of the eighteenth century. The slave population increased naturally. As a result family formation was common, although it was not recognized by white slave owners. A "Negro woman named Mary….had several children one call Moll" and "Negro Moll had several children will she lived with my brother James." Moll and her children and grandchildren all lived in North Kingstown.[202] Like southern planters, northern slave owners rarely included the names of fathers when they recorded the births of enslaved infants. Narragansett slaves, like most northern slaves, lived the homes of their masters; however, a few estates were large enough to warrant separate slave quarters.[203] Though most slaves were involved in live stock and agricultural labor, they also worked as skilled tradesmen and domestic servants.[204] Slavery was not a benign institution in colonial Rhode Island. Common punishments included whippings, floggings and threat of sale. Masters also commissioned and purchased devices to restrain their slaves. Chronic runaways were maimed.[205] Rhode Island blacks in the Narragansett, like their southern counterparts, lived under a series of increasingly restrictive black codes. In South County, where blacks were almost 40% of the total population, free blacks were not allowed to entertain slaves, gather in large numbers or own livestock. Those found in violation of these crimes were whipped and could be sold into slavery. In slave societies like the Narragansett, it was not enough to control slave property; all members of the population who could be enslaved had to be restricted as well.[206]

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[202] Ibid.

[203] Fitts, *Inventing New England's Slave Paradise*, 104-108, 142.

[204] Ibid., 111-113.

[205] Ibid., 138-140.

[206] Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen*, 14. See Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*.

Like slave societies throughout the Americas the relationship between slaves and masters in the Narragansett was complex and contradictory. For example, in 1749, Joseph Wanton bequeathed all his "Negroes" to his son Edward. There was, however, a catch. He would allow those slaves who were "not willing to live with him [Edward]" to live with his daughters. But, if his daughters "decline taking such Negro or Negroes that wants to be sold aforsed, the sd Negro or Negroes shall have the liberty of Chosing a Master or Mistress that will buy them provided they will give as good a prize for e'm as another."[207] In 1772, Christopher Gardner, testified that his brother's slave Moll scaled her master's (James Gardner) son to death, but she was never prosecuted.[208] These cases raise intriguing questions. Why would Wanton allow his slave to choose their own masters? Why did James Gardner prosecute Moll for murder, especially since his brother witness the alleged crime? Both the Wanton and the Gardner families had held slaves for over a generation. These experienced slave holders most likely understood that slave management often included successions to enslaved people.

Slave Resistance

Enslaved people challenged the institution of slavery, through flight, violence and the destruction of property. They refused to be the dependents, and their actions defied the racial ideology of their masters. Local slave law reveals how enslaved Rhode Islanders used the extensive waterways of the colony to evade their masters. It was such a concern that in 1714 the General Assembly forbade slaves to board ferries alone, even

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[207] The Will of Joseph Wanton, part of the following suit: Benjamin Holland, an infant who sues by his Guardian Gilbert Devol vs. Mary Richardson, Joseph G. Wanton, John G. Wanton, Gideon Wanton, Edward Wanton, Henry Bowers and Mary his wife, Abraham Borden, Thomas Howland, Charles Whitfield and Elizabeth his wife, Newport, Rhode Island, August 14, 1749. Jane Fletcher Fiske, Gleaning from Newport Courtfile, 1659-1783 (Boxford, 1998), #1129.

[208] Deposition of Christopher Gardner at North Kinstown, May 22, 1772 which was part of the following suit: Susanna Womsley, an infant within the age of twenty one years who sues by Mary Womsley, her mother and next friend vs. Jeffrey Watson, Newport, Rhode Island, April 25, 1772. Fiske, *Gleanings from Newport Court Files*, # 1130.

under the directives of their masters, without a certificate of ownership carried by their master or mistress or some person (white) in authority. [209] Enslaved Rhode Islanders also stowed away on ships—which were plentiful in the port cities of Newport, Providence and Bristol. In to limit this practice the Assembly permitted slave owners to search ships at will. Furthermore, they made captains responsible for ensuring that no slaves were hidden on their vessels.[210] This Act, passed in 1757, allowed slaveholders to search private vessels if they suspected that human property was stowed aboard it. They were also entitled to double damages if a privateer or captain was found guilty of stealing an inhabitant's slave.[211] These types of laws made all whites responsible for enforcing race based slave law, which made all whites part of the master class. The Rhode Island General Assembly was determined to protect the slave property of its white residents. However, despite the Assembly's efforts, slaves fled their masters; between 1732 and 1775, urban and town dwelling Rhode Island slaveholders placed 100 runaway slave advertisements in several local and regional papers.[212] Slaves absconded from small

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[209] John Russell Bartlett, Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. IV 1707-1740, (Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Co, 1859), 179.

[210] The act read: Whereas, it frequently happens that the commanders of privateers and masters of other vessels, do carry off slaves that are the property of inhabitants of this colony, and the that without the privity or consent of their masters or mistresses; whereas, there is no law of this colony for remedying so great an evil,--Be it therefore enacted by this General Assembly , and by the authority of the same, it is enacted, that from and after the publication of this act, if any commander of private man of war, or master of a merchant ship or other vessel, shall knowingly carry away from, or out of this colony, a slave or slaves, the property of ay inhabitant thereof, the commander of such privateer, or the master of the said merchant ship or vessel, shall pay, as a fine, the sum of £500, to be recovered by the general treasurer of this colony for the time being, by bill, plaint, or information in any court of record within this colony.Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. VI 1757-1769*, 64.

[211] Ibid., 64-65.

[212] Maureen Alice Taylor and John Wood Sweet eds. *Runaways, Deserters, and Notorious Villains: From Rhode Island Newspapers Volume 2: Additional notices from the Providence Gazette, 1762 – 1800 as well as advertisements from all other Rhode Island Newspapers from 1732 – 1800* (Rockport: Picton Press, 2001).

towns and cities throughout the colony; however, most of the reported runaways were young males from the Narragansett, the region with the highest concentration of slaves.[213] Rhode Island slaves also resisted the institution of slavery with violence, arson in particular. Four incidents of slave arson appeared in local newspapers between 1747 and 1773. Fortune, an "abandoned Negro," reportedly set fire to the Long Wharf causing £80,000 in damage.[214] Fortune was summarily executed.[215] Thomas Randall's "black servant boy," tired of tending animals, confessed to setting the barn on fire.[216] Two disgruntled male servants also set their respective masters' homes afire.[217] Their interactions with whites and other free people was also a cause for concern to colonial officials. A 1751 act restricting the "entertaining of Indian, negro or mulatto servants or slaves," allows a glimpse into the social world of the enslaved.[218] Assuming that the law sought to restrict behavior, enslaved people were apparently socializing with poor people of all races—black, white and Indian.

Formerly enslaved black Rhode Islanders also challenged the institution of slavery. On April 25, 1772, Mary Womsley sued Jeffrey Watson for falsely imprisoning

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[213] There were eight females and 92 males reported missing from 1732-1775 they included eight Indians, 18 Mulattoes, nine Mustees, 64 Negroes. There were four teenagers, nine in their 20s, six in their 30s and one 40 year old. 24 slaves ran away from the Narragansett (North Kingstown; South Kingstown and Charlestown), 13 from Newport, six from Tiverton; five from Providence; four from Warwick, four from New Shoreham, two from Block Island, two from Johnston, two from Warren, one from Rehoboth, and one from Hopkinton. Several ads did not list the slaves' race, age or the place they ran from. See Taylor and Sweet, *Runaways*.

[214] *The New-London Summary*, 26 February 1762, p. 2.

[215] "Extract of a letter from London," *Boston Evening Post*, 22 March 1762, p. 2.

[216] *Newport Mercury*, 15 February 1773.

[217] *Boston Evening Post*, 27 April 1774. *Essex Gazette*, 12 March 1772.

[218] A 1751 Act to prevent the entertaining and engaging in commerce with Negro or Indian slaves.

John Russell Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. V 1741-1756*, (Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Co, 1860), 320.

and selling her daughter Susanna as a slave. Womsley, a former slave, claimed that her daughter was "free and not subject to the arbitrary Will and control of any of his Majesty's subjects." Watson, a gentleman farmer, argued that he was acting as one of the commissioners of an indebt estate that listed eleven year old Susanna as the debtors property. Both Mary and Susanna Wamsley were declared free when testimony from neighbors and the debtor's family revealed that Mary had been promised her freedom by her master before he died and before Susannah was born.[219] Slaves were not only victims of law they also tried to influence legal practice. Enslaved people frustrated their masters and local courts with deceit and violence.[220] In colonial Rhode Island, slaves were indeed troublesome property.

Conclusion—The Burning of the *Gaspee*

By 1750, colonial Rhode Islanders were dependent on the business of slavery, and this dependency increased in the two following decades. One incident, the burning of the King's schooner the *Gaspee,* reveals how far white Rhode Islanders were willing to go to prevent any restriction on the commerce that created their wealth. The merchant class of Rhode Island valued trade above all else and met any interference with their trading activities with strong resistance. The British insistence on enforcing trade law in the late 1760s and early 1770s transformed white Rhode Islanders from loyal subjects into to revolutionaries. Long before the first revolutionary battles were fought, Rhode Island merchants violently resisted English interference with their commerce. In retaliation for British enforcement of trade law and revenue collection in particular, prominent local

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[219] Susanna Womsley, an infant within the age of twenty one years who sues by Mary Womsley, her mother and next friend vs. Jeffrey Watson, Newport, Rhode Island, April 25, 1772. Fiske, *Gleanings from Newport Court Files*, # 1130.

[220] The Rhode Island General Assembly passed a 1719 law calling for expeditious trails of "Negro" and Indian slaves accused of theft. Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. IV 1707-1740*, 420.

merchants destroyed the *Gaspee* and nearly killed its captain.[221] This was not the first time Rhode Island colonists had destroyed the property of the Crown. In 1769, the sloop *Liberty*, which was sent by the King to regulate trade, was pillaged and burned by locals in Newport. The exploits of Stamp Act protesters and Boston Tea Party participants are very well known. The destruction of the *Gaspee*, although not on the same scale, was similarly dangerous and traitorous. Although this incident has been largely lost to the national history of the American Revolution, the *Gaspee* Affair clearly demonstrates how resistant Rhode Islanders were to the interruption of their trading activities.

The *Gaspee* arrived in Rhode Island in March of 1772, sent by the crown's commissioners of customs to ensure revenue payments and prevent long-standing illicit trade in the colony. The vessel and its captain quickly gained a repugnant reputation among Rhode Islanders. Lieutenant William Duddingston, captain of the *Gaspee*, became notorious among Rhode Island merchants for stopping and searching all vessels, whether they were engaged in domestic, intercolonial or foreign trade. He was despised for his arrogant behavior and the thefts committed by his crew.[222] Darius Sessions, Deputy Governor, complained to Governor Wanton, on behalf of local businessmen. In his letter he protested that, "She [the Gaspee] suffers no vessels to pass, not even packet boats, or other of an inferior kind, without a strict examination, and where any sort of unwillingness is discovered, they are compelled to submit by an armed force." Furthermore, Sessions questioned the authority of the schooner's captain: "Who is he and by what authority he assumes such conduct[?]." In response, the Governor wrote Duddingston asking him to present his credentials. Duddingston responded that: "I have

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[221]Meier Schlesinger, "Political Mobs and the American Revolution, 1765-1776," *American Philosophical Society*, 99 no. 4 (August 30, 1955): 244-245 and William R. Leslie, "The Gaspee Affair: A Study of Its Constitutional Significance," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39, no. 2 (September 1952): 233-256.

[222] Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons: 1975), 319-337.

done nothing but what was my duty, and their complaint can only be founded on their ignorance of that." He than sent an officer to the Governor in his place. Governor Wanton was not impressed with the officer or the Captain's explanation. He claimed that the officer did not bring "any authentic information respecting the legality of that authority you have presumed to exercise within this Colony."[223]

The presence of the Gaspee led to immediate and severe tensions between the locally elected Governor Wanton and royally appointed Admiral Montagu. Montagu threatened to hang any Rhode Island resident who dared to interfere with the duties of the crew of the *Gaspee*.[224] The situation with *Gaspee* reached a tipping point on June 10, 1772. The *Gaspee*, while in pursuit of Captain Thomas Lindsey's packet (a local merchant ship), was grounded at Namquit Point, just off the Providence River. After eluding Duddingston, Lindsey told John Brown (of Providence) that the *Gaspee* would be immobile for hours. Brown reportedly spread the word throughout town "that the Gaspee was aground on Namquit Point, and would not float off until 3 o'clock in the next morning." Moreover, Brown allegedly invited "those person who felt a disposition to go and destroy that troublesome vessel, to repair in the evening to Mr. James Sabin's house." "A party" of armed men left Mr. Sabin's home around 10:00 pm and headed toward Namquit Point; the men positioned their ships around the *Gaspee* and as they approached, Duddingston called out: "Who comes there?" One of the perpetrators claimed to be the sheriff of Kent County and called out: "I have got a warrant to apprehend you, G—d d—n you; so surrender G—d d—n you." When Duddingston

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[223] The documents in this history include: correspondence, the action of the General Assembly of Rhode Island and the Official Journal of the Proceedings of the Commission of inquiry appointed by King George the III. William R. Staples, *Documentary History of the Destruction of the Gaspee. Complied for the Providence Journal* (Providence: Knowles, Vose, and Anthony, 1845), 1-4.

[224] Ibid., 5.

refused, he was shot, twice. Duddingston was hit in his groin and arm. The crew of the *Gaspee* was ordered off the ship and the vessel was set afire. It was totally destroyed.[225]

Several men were implicated in the destruction of the *Gaspee*, although none of them would ever be tried. Governor Wanton clearly endorsed the men's actions. Just days after the burning of the *Gaspee*, instead of focusing on capturing the perpetrators, Wanton continued to complain about trade restrictions: "I am extremely sorry that I have still reason to say, the trade of this Colony is interrupted in a most unprecedented and oppressive manner…. if such manners are permitted to be pursued, the Colony will ere long be involved in the deepest calamity."[226] However, crown officials such as Admiral Montagu and Lieutenant Duddingston were committed to bringing the perpetrators to justice.

Aaron Briggs, "a negro man or mulatto," indicted several Rhode Island merchants in the burning of the *Gaspee*, including John and Joseph Brown (Providence), Simeon Potter (of Bristol), and Doctor Weeks (Warwick). All of these men were respected members of the community; in fact, they were among the leading residents of the colony. Briggs claimed to have rowed several men out to the ships that surrounded and fired on the King's schooner; he also claimed to have rowed some of the captured crew of the *Gaspee* to the mainland. Wanton solicited several affidavits to discredit Briggs's statements. Briggs' master, Samuel Thompkins claimed that his testimony was false because Briggs was at home when the *Gaspee* was burned. However, a crew member of the *Gaspee* corroborated Briggs' statement and Thompkins refused to make Briggs available for further interview.[227] The Governor subsequently closed the case stating:

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[225] Ibid., 8-15.

[226] Ibid., 16.

[227] Samuel Thurston of Portsmouth asserted that Briggs, the indentured servant of his son-in-law Samuel Thompkins, had not been off Aquidneck Island for more than 12 months. Moreover, he claimed that Aaron had "remained in his house the whole of the night[the Gaspee

> The Schooner, when she was destroyed, lay aground in a narrow river near thirty miles from the main sea, and as all ports and havens are infra corpus comitatus, I am of opinion, that in this case, the Admiral hath no jurisdiction. When Aaron is delivered into the hands of the civil authority, whatever is legal and necessary will undoubtedly be done. I have advised the King's Attorney, whose opinion and advice coincides with what I have written on the subject of Aaron's declaration

Admiral Montagu was not impressed with Governor Wanton's explanation, nor the depositions he obtained to refute Brigg claim. Nevertheless, he did not further pursue the issue, instead leaving the matter to the Governor. [228] In August of 1772, two months after the incident, King George sent a proclamation advocating the apprehension of those who burned the *Gaspee*. The King offered rewards of £500 and £1000. The proclamation was posted to public places throughout the colony.[229] The King's commission also questioned everyone who had been previously interviewed.[230] However, despite the King's rewards and the commission's inquires, no one was arrested or punished for wounding Lieutenant Duddingston and burning the *Gaspee*. Governor Wanton claimed that in spite of this thorough investigation he was unable to charge anyone, because the witness Briggs, the only one to name names, had been threatened with hanging. Therefore, his story was questionable at best.[231]

The *Gaspee* Affair reveals important facts about Rhode Island merchants. One, they were absolutely dependent on unrestricted trade, and they were willing to commit violent crimes and treason to protect their commerce. When the crown attempted to

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was burned], he having seen him the evening and early in the morning of the 10th at his work." Samuel Tompkins corroborated his father-in-law's statement. Furthermore, two of Tompkins' indentured servants, "Somerset, a mulatto, and Jack, a negro" claimed to have shared a bed with Briggs on night in question. Ibid., 17-18.

[228] Ibid., 19-20.

[229] Ibid., 20 and 24.

[230] Governor Wanton, Chief Justice of the Colony Stephen Hopkins, Aaron Briggs, Samuel Tompkins, Samuel Thurston, the crew of the *Gaspee* and several men from the surrounding area were interviewed by crown officials. Ibid., 28-41.

[231] Ibid., 52-54.

regulate their trade and force them to pay duties, Rhode Island merchants took that as a threat to their livelihood. Simply put, Rhode Islanders felt they could not afford to be regulated in their trading activities and any attempt to control trading in or around their borders was met with violent retaliation. The *Gaspee* Affair demonstrates the lengths that respectable men would go to in order to preserve the trade that lay at the core of their economic interests.

CHAPTER 3

PIECEMEAL EMANCIPATION IN RHODE ISLAND, 1770-1842

When James Howland died in 1859 he was 100 years old and had lived as a slave in Rhode Island for nearly all his life.[232] He lived as a slave until 1842 when the state of Rhode Island finally abolished slavery. The Rhode Island General Assembly waited until there were just a few slaves left in the state to abolish the institution of slavery.[233] Neither, the ideals and rhetoric of the American Revolution, black resistance, nor northern gradual emancipation laws had freed Howland. James Howland's life tragically exemplifies the complexities and limitations of gradual emancipation in the North, and Rhode Island in particular.

The American Revolution initiated the end of slavery in the North, but the process was slow and uneven. For African Americans in Rhode Island, freedom came in stages. Slave flight, African American military service, private manumissions and gradual emancipation laws dismantled northern slavery. Most of these things happened in most northern states, but it was surprising that all of them happened in Rhode Island, because white Rhode Islanders were economically invested in the institution of slavery in ways their northern neighbors were not. In the decades preceding the Revolutionary War, Rhode Island merchants dominated the American trade in slaves, and its residents held the highest proportion of slaves in New England. During the revolutionary period, white Rhode Islanders were divided on the issue of slaveholding within Rhode Island. The Quakers, who were politically powerful in Rhode Island, denounced slaveholding; their

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[232] Howland was enslaved for 83 of his 100 years. Robert Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees: Providence's Black Community in the antebellum era* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 147.

[233] According to the 1840 census there were just five slaves in the state of Rhode Island. Ken Carlson, a reference archivist at the Rhode Island State Archives has complied a list of non-white residents in Rhode Island Cities in 1774 through 1850. Ken Carlson, "Rhode Island—Minority Population black/ negro/ mulatto/ mustee/ Indian" (Rhode Island State Archives, 2006).

stance in conjunction with black resistance contributed to the decline of slavery in the state. However, many white Rhode Islanders remained committed to the businesses of slavery. In 1784, the same year the gradual emancipation law passed, local slave traders transported over 700 slaves to the Americas.[234] Furthermore, local merchants continued to supply slave societies in the West Indies and the American South with food, household goods and slaves. White Rhode Islanders remained economically tied to the institution of slavery throughout the emancipation process.

Two parallel and sometimes overlapping histories reveal how and why slavery was dismantled in Rhode Island. African Americans were responsible for the practical break down of the institution of slavery, while whites undermined slavery's legal infrastructure in Rhode Island. For African Americans, the emancipation process spanned eight decades, and began with an increase in slave flight, and was fueled by wartime military service and postwar private manumissions. The 1784 gradual emancipation law, sponsored by Quaker abolitionists, legally sanctioned emancipation and signaled an eventual end to slavery. Among white Rhode Islanders, their experience of emancipation began as a religious mandate, then was intensified by the difficulties and necessities of war, and was finalized when the state incrementally restricted the right of its citizen to hold human property. By 1775, most Rhode Island Quaker meetings forbade slaveholding among their members, and some Congregationalist groups had also denounced the practice. For pro-slavery whites, emancipation began when slaveholders began to lose control over their human property during the American Revolution. In 1774, Rhode Island forbade its residents from importing more slaves. In 1778, the demands of war led Rhode Island to privilege the needs of the state over slaveholders'

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234 John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. X. 1784-1792* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Company, 1859), 7 and David Eltis, et al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade A Database on CD-ROM [CD-ROM]]* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

individual rights to retain their human property when the General Assembly attempted to raise a regiment of slaves. In 1779, under pressure from local abolitionists, the state forbade slaveholders from selling their slaves out of the state. In 1784, the state put an expiration date on mastery, by passing a gradual emancipation law. Rhode Island's emancipation process was a slow, multilayered and race-based experience.

Many scholars have studied emancipation in the North. However, Rhode Island has yet to receive singular investigation, despite slavery's significance to the local economy. Among those works studying the end of northern slavery, one theme has dominated the scholarship; black resistance. In the last twenty years, historians have argued that black military service, flight, rebellions and freedom suits led to the destruction of northern slavery.[235] Historians have also offered a more nuanced version of the collapse of slavery in the North, arguing that it was a result of alliances between blacks and whites.[236] Yet still other scholars have focused on how African Americans distanced themselves from the institution of slavery through slave flight, while whites did the same through selling their slaves out of the state, which they attributed to their anti-slavery sentiments.[237] All of these studies focus on the demise of slavery in places where

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[235] George Fishman situates the black struggle for freedom within the American Revolution, arguing that the black fight for freedom was part of the Revolution, not a by-product of it. Graham Hodges discusses the insolence among slaves during the Revolutionary era in Monmouth County, one of the few northern locales where plantation slavery existed. He focuses on how the enslaved challenged their masters by running away, suing for their freedom, threatening rebellion and finally bargaining with their masters for term slavery. Shane White argues that the demise of slavery in New York was a result of black resistance not white abolitionist sentiment. George Fishman, *African American Struggle for Freedom and Equality: the Development of a People's Identity, New Jersey, 1624-1850* (New York: Garland, 1997), Graham Russell Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African American in Monmouth County, New Jersey 1665-1865* (Madison: Madison House, 1997) and Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: the End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: Georgia University Press, 1991).

[236] See Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African American in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[237] See Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) and Gary Nash, *Freedom by*

slave labor was not important to the local economy. In contrast, in Rhode Island both the businesses of slavery and slave labor were essential components of the local economy. This chapter explores how the emancipation process plays out in a state where both the business of slavery and slave labor were essential to the state's economic stability.

White and black Rhode Islanders resembled their northern neighbors in many ways; however, they also differed from them considerably. Enslaved Rhode Islanders, like their northern counterparts, used the chaos of war to flee slavery in increasing numbers and volunteered for military service. White abolitionists in Rhode Island, like their white neighbors, successfully pushed for a gradual emancipation law. However, unlike their northern neighbors, Rhode Islanders did so in an environment still deeply entrenched in the businesses of slavery. The case of Rhode Island clearly demonstrates the various ways enslaved people, not gradual emancipation laws, destroyed the institution of slavery.

The Businesses of Slavery and Emancipation

The emancipation process in Rhode Island must be understood within the context of white Rhode Islanders' involvement in the businesses of slavery. Gradual emancipation was possible because many white Rhode Islanders were more dependent on the businesses of slavery than they were on using slave labor. For example, in 1774 nearly 66% of Newport slaveholders were directly involved in the West Indian trade or the Atlantic slave trade, and many of them were involved in both trades. They owned slaving vessels, imported molasses and rum and supplied the West Indies with basic necessities such as candles, timber and foodstuffs. For these merchants their slaves bolstered their wealth, but the businesses of slavery were the source of their wealth.[238]

Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[238] See Table 1. Elaine Forman Crane, *A Dependent People Newport, Rhode Island in the Revolutionary Era* (New York: Fordham Press, 1985), 25-29.

Despite the physical destruction of the war and severe depopulation as a result of British occupation, Newport remained the slave trading center of New England. Rhode Island merchants dominated the trade during its last legal decades and continued to defy the law well into the nineteenth century.[239] Rhode Island merchants fought and then simply ignored both state and federal restrictions concerning the slave trade. As historian Jay Coughtry asserts,

> …the merchants involved in it did everything they could to save it. They fought the state abolition society, violated state and federal laws passed to prohibit their commerce in slaves, defended their position on the floor of the House of Representatives, and finally enlisted the aid of a United States president to salvage their cause."[240]

In 1787, the Rhode Island General Assembly forbade Rhode Islanders from participating in the Atlantic slave trade. In 1794, Congress declared that ships carrying slaves to foreign countries could not leave from U. S. ports.[241] These restrictions were largely ignored by Rhode Island merchants, who blatantly disregarded state and federal laws.[242] After 1787 Rhode Island traders transported over 40,000 African slaves to the Caribbean and the southern United States. All other New England merchants combined transported just 6,409 African slaves in the same time period, while New York and Carolina merchants together transported just 7,330.[243] In fact, 45% of all slave trading

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[239] There is a record of a slave voyage leaving out Bristol Rhode Island in 1819. Eltis, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade A Database on CD-ROM*.

[240] Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807*(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 18.

[241] Douglass Harper, "Slavery in the North," 2003 < http://www.slavenorth.com/index.html> (2003).

[242] John Brown, one of the richest men in Providence, was never punished for violating Rhode Island's slave trading restrictions and James Dewolf of Bristol Rhode Island, "one reputed to be the richest man in America," commonly violated state and federal slave trading laws. Anne Farrow, et. al. *Complicity : how the North promoted, prolonged, and profited from slavery*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005),101-102.

[243] Ibid.

voyages from Rhode Island occurred after 1776.[244] This is remarkable considering the city of Newport was occupied by British troops throughout the war. Even when the U.S. government banned all involvement in the Atlantic slave trade in 1808, Rhode Islanders continued to ply their trade in humans. Although state legislators had laid the groundwork for dismantling slavery and attempted restrict its citizens from participating in the Atlantic slave trade, Rhode Island merchants, skilled tradesmen and farmers remained economically entrenched in the slavery-centered economy of the Atlantic world. During this era the businesses of slavery dominated Rhode Island's economy, even as enslaved people, with the support of white abolitionists, pushed for emancipation. Many white Rhode Islanders were more invested in protecting the businesses of slavery than defending their right to own slaves.

African American Experiences of Emancipation

The northern emancipation process was initiated by the actions taken by enslaved African Americans during the colonial rebellion. Nearly twenty years ago, historian Sylvia Frey argued that the Revolutionary War in the American South was not just a struggle for freedom, but also a struggle over slavery. She asserted that enslaved people made the war about slavery.[245] Slaves in the North also made the Revolutionary War about slavery. Northern slaves ran away in unprecedented numbers, volunteered for military service, sued for their freedom and lobbied for abolition. Their challenges to slavery led to emancipation in the North, while black resistance in the South led to a

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[244] Ibid.

[245] Egerton extends his argument by arguing that the two decades following the American Revolution "amounted to a counterrevolution for black Americans." Sylvia Frey, *Water From the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 45 and Douglass Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12.

severe back-lash against people of African descent and the second African Diaspora.[246] These differing outcomes for northern and southern slaves occurred for one primary reason. Most southern slaves lived in slave societies, while most northern slaves lived in societies with slaves.[247] White northerners were less dependent on slave labor and more dependent on the businesses of slavery. Consequently, northern black resistance, coupled with a growing white abolitionist movement, encouraged a successful push for gradual emancipation. On the other hand, white southerners were deeply dependent on slave labor, and feared massive rebellion from the hundreds of thousands of enslaved people living in their midst. The threat of slavery's end only exaggerated their fears. As a result, white southerners reinforced their practices of slavery, even as they grew increasingly suspicious of their human property.

The end of slavery in the North was both abrupt and slow. Most northern states passed gradual emancipation laws following the American Revolution; however, the states that held the most slaves did not abolish the institution until well into the nineteenth century. By 1790, 40% of African Americans in the North were free and by 1840, 99% were free (table 6).[248] Only two states, Vermont and Massachusetts, abolished slavery outright. Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York and New Jersey, passed gradual emancipation laws.[249] These laws stipulated that children born to

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[246] Following the American Revolution many southern slaves (who absconded or fought on the side of the British) either fled or were sent to Nova Scotia, England, the Bahamas, Jamaica, and even West Africa. Those blacks who remained in the South, both free and enslaved, were legally classified as non-persons—non-citizens. See Frey, *Water from the Rock*.

[247] See Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 1998), 8 and Egerton, *Death or Liberty*, 96.

[248] See Table 6.

[249] The state of Vermont abolished slavery in 1777, six years later, in 1783, the Massachusetts Supreme Court declared slavery unconstitutional. In 1780, the Pennsylvania state legislature passed the nation's first gradual emancipation law, legislators in Rhode Island and Connecticut followed in 1784. New York and New Jersey were among the last northern states to pass gradual emancipation laws in 1799 and 1804, respectively. New York (1827), Rhode Island

slave mothers after a certain date were free, but indentured to their mother's master. Some states freed children when they reached their majority, while other states indentured freed people well into adulthood. Gradual emancipation laws also created an environment in which enslaved people could better negotiate for their freedom. But, it was black protest that brought an end to slavery, not gradual emancipation laws; in fact, most northern slaves gained their freedom before gradual emancipation laws could take effect.[250] In Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Connecticut, gradual emancipation laws would not free enslaved people until 1808, 1805 and 1802, respectively.[251] Yet, by 1810, the majority of African Americans in Pennsylvania (97%), Rhode Island (97%) and Connecticut (95%) has already gained their freedom. The gradual emancipation laws in New York and New Jersey would not free anyone until 1824 and 1825; yet, by 1820, 74% of black New Yorkers and 62% of black New Jersians were free (table 6).[252] In the North the emancipation process was abrupt for many, but slow and uneven for others. Gradual emancipation law immediately put an end to the perpetuation of slavery; however, it took several decades for the institution of slavery to die out because the laws that freed the children of slaves also required years of uncompensated labor for freed people.

(1842) and Connecticut (1848) all abolished slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century, the institution of slavery was never abolished in New Jersey and New Hampshire. Berlin, *Many Thousand Gone* 232-233.

[250] John Wood Sweet, "'More Than Tears:' The Ordeal of Abolition in Revolutionary New England," *Explorations in Early American Culture*, 5 (2001), 151-152.

[251] See Table 7.

[252] See Table 6 and 7.

Table 6: Percentage of the Black Population that was Free (numbers of free blacks)

	1790	**1810**	**1820**	**1840**
North	40% o (27, 109)	74% (78,181)	84% (99,281)	99% (99,281)
Connecticut	50% (2,801)	95% (6,453)	----	----
Rhode Island	79% (3,469)	97% (3,609)	99% (3,554)	99% (3,238)
New York	18% (4,654)	63% (25,333)	74% (29,279)	99% (50,027)
New Jersey	20% (2,762)	42% (7,843)	62% (12,460)	97% (21,044)
Pennsylvania	64% (6,537)	97% (22,492)	99% (30,202)	99% (47,854)

Source: This table was complied based on the census data from historian Ira Berlin. Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 369

Table 7: Gradual Emancipation Laws in Northern States

States	Law passed	Indentured or Apprenticed until	First Emancipation Dates	Abolished Slavery
Pennsylvania	1780	28 years for females and males	1808	1780?
Connecticut	1784	25 years reduced to 21 years in 1791	1805	1848
Rhode Island	1784	21 years for females and Males	1802	1842
New York	1799	25 years for females 28 years for males	1824	1827
New Jersey	1804	21 years for females 25 years for males	1825	1865

Source: This table was complied based on information from Douglass Harper's website. Douglass Harper is a professional historian, author and journalist. His website is a collection of dates and facts concerning northern slavery. He draws of the work of several prominent historians. Douglass Harper, "Slavery in the North," 2003 < http://www.slavenorth.com/index.html> (2003)

Seizing Freedom—Running Away

An estimated 100,000 slaves, or one in every five, escaped during the American Revolution.[253] Encouraged by revolutionary rhetoric and emboldened by new opportunities that arose in the chaos of war, enslaved people dealt the first blow to the institution of slavery in the North. In Rhode Island, the number of runaways tripled during the revolutionary period. The number of reported runaways in pre-Revolutionary Rhode Island was small and largely located in town and port cities. Nevertheless, this thin evidence does suggest some distinct patterns. Before 1770, urban and town dwelling Rhode Island slaveholders placed 54 runaway slave advertisements (49 in the 1760s alone) in several local and regional papers. However, 145 slaves were reported missing between 1770 and 1800. Moreover, between 1770 and 1775, slaveholders placed 46 ads—the most of any five year period (table 7). In other words, 73% of all runaway ads in Rhode Island were placed during the early revolutionary period, and a curiously high number of ads were placed five years prior to the outbreak of the war.[254] This trend suggests that enslaved Rhode Islanders may have taken took advantage of their masters' preoccupation with impending war to slip the bonds of slavery.

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[253] Herbert Aptheker, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), 5-8.

[254] These numbers only represent those identified as slaves who ran away from town and cities in Rhode Island. Table 3 the newspaper in which the ad was placed, date, owner and place of escape, as well as the name, age, sex and physical description of the slave. It differentiates between slaves, indentured servants and apprentices. Maureen Alice Taylor and John Wood Sweet, ed., *Runaways, Deserters, and Notorious Villains: From Rhode Island Newspapers Volume 2: Additional notices from the Providence Gazette, 1762 – 1800 as well as advertisements from all other Rhode Island Newspapers from 1732 – 1800* (Rockport: Picton Press, 2001).

Table 8: Rhode Island Runaway Slave Advertisements, 1732 – 1800

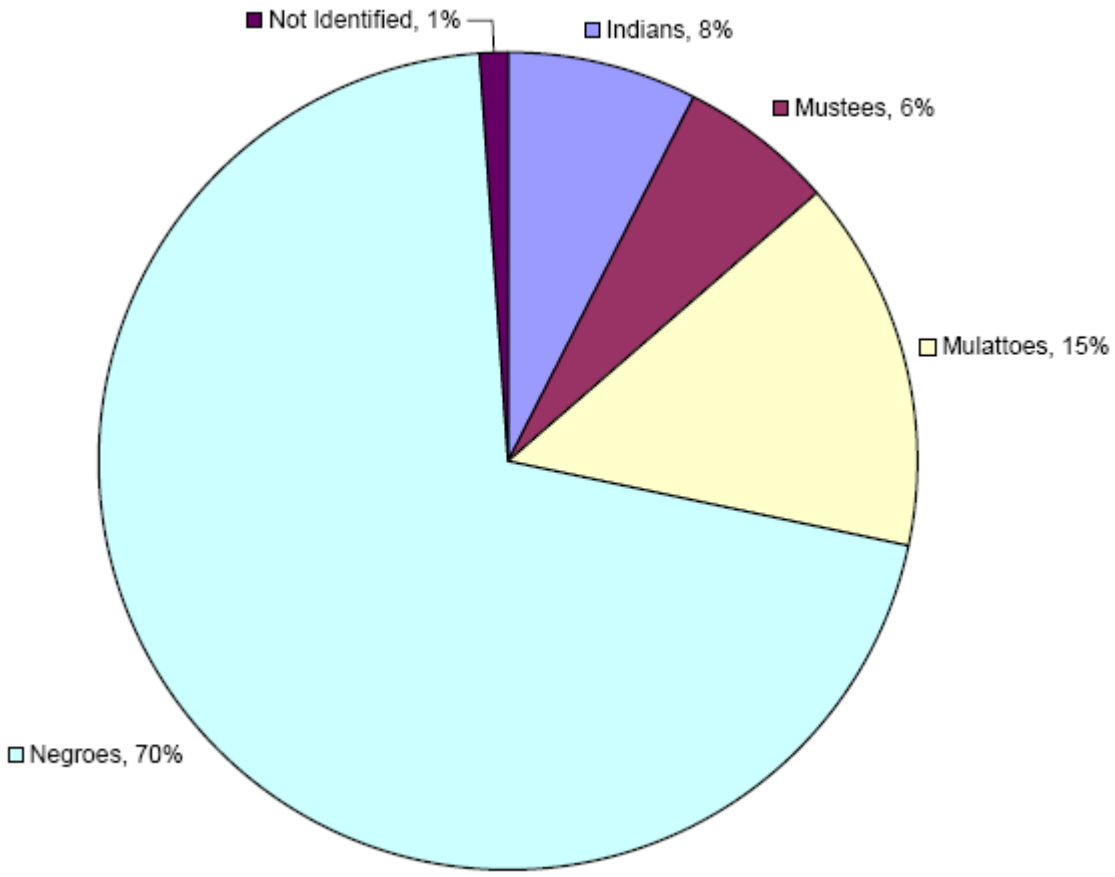
Years	# of Runaway Slave Ads	Gender of Runaways
1732 – 1769	54 (49 in the 1760s)	48 Men 6 Women
1770 – 1775	46	44 Men 2 Women
1776 – 1780	21	18 Men 3 Women
1781 – 1785	26	23 Men 3 Women
1786 – 1790	9	6 Men 3 Women
1791 – 1795	10	7 Men 3 Women
1796 – 1800	31	18 Men 13 Women
Total	**197**	**164 Men** **33 Women**

Source: This table was complied based on running slave advertisements placed in local and regional papers in Rhode Island and New England. Ibid

The number of runaway slave advertisements in Rhode Island was small, yet like their counterparts throughout British North America, the vast majority of Rhode Island runaways were male, young and black. Between 1732 and 1800, only 33 ads were placed for women, in contrast to 164 placed for men. Yet, it is important to note that slave women were four and a half times more likely to run away during and after the revolution, while men were only two and a half times more likely to run. This trend suggests that war had a particularly significant impact on women's opportunities to flee. Over 70% of the runaways were described as "Negroes," 15% as "Mulattoes," 8% as "Indians" and 6% as "Mustees."[255] Most of the runaways were under the age of twenty five and a significant number were teenagers. 72% of the runaways were under 30, 53% were between the ages of 18 and 25, and 16% were under the age of 18. Children were also running away by themselves. Over a quarter (28.5%) of Rhode Island runaways escaped from the Narragansett (North Kingstown, South Kingstown and Charlestown), while 19% and 11% ran away from Newport and Providence, respectively (figure 5). This trend mirrored of the patterns of slaveholding in Rhode Island. The Narragansett held the highest proportion of slaves in Rhode Island, followed by the cities of Newport and Providence (figures 4 and 5).

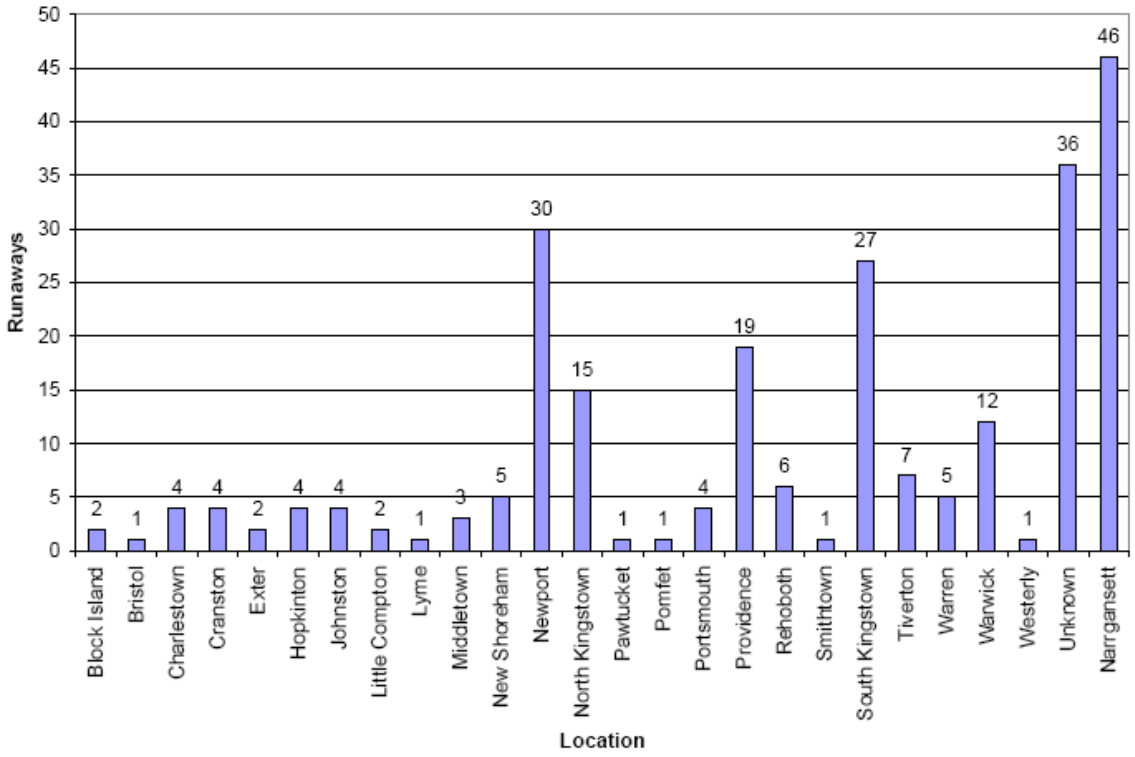
[255] These calculations are based on runaway slave advertisements placed in local and regions papers in Rhode Island and New England. Ibid.

Figure 4: Rhode Island Runaways by Race/Ethnicity (1732-1800)



Source: This graph was complied based on information from run slave ads placed in local and regional papers in Rhode Island and New England. These ads were placed by whites, therefore the racial categories reflect their interpretations of race. See Taylor and Sweet, *Runaways*

Figure 5: Rhode Island Runaways by Location (1732-1800)



Source: This graph was complied based on information from run slave ads placed in local and regional papers in Rhode Island and New England. See Taylor and Sweet, *Runaways*

Eighteenth century Rhode Island runaway ads also reveal that many slaves had significant injuries. Over 20% of the runaways were identifiable by scars. Twenty of them had scars on their faces, while twenty-three were marked on their bodies. The evidence suggests that these scars were most likely a result of work accidents, punishments, neglect, or illness rather than cultural scars. “Country or guinea marks” were typically identified as such in advertisements for runaway slaves. Quako, who was “short and thickset,” had letters branded on his shoulders. Robert, who was born in Jamaica, had a burn scar between his cheek and his mouth. London, who ran away from Newport, had “lost” all his toes on both feet. Prime, a fourteen year old who only stood 4’4, had whipping scars on his arms and back. Sias, a “bold and impudent” 24 year old, had “several marks left by the King’s evil [whip] on his neck.” Others ran despite obvious disabilities. Prince had “small crooked legs.” A number of runaway slaves (seven) had survived small pox, and were left with life-long scars. These physical descriptions suggests that enslaved Rhode Islanders were physically punished, employed in dangerous labor, inadequately clothed and received minimal medical attention.

Rhode Island runaway advertisements also offer a glimpse into the diverse motivations for slave flight. While undoubtedly most fled to gain their freedom, their circumstances made each person’s incentives different. Sarah Thompson, a teenager with “large eyes,” fled find her mother, who she believed lived in Providence. Richard, a “pocked marked” 25 year old, reportedly ran away to reunite with his wife in 1783. In the 1790s, four women ran away with children under the age of four. According to the Rhode Island 1784 gradual emancipation law, these children were “free.” The evidence suggests that these mothers may have been attempting to secure freedom for themselves, as well as free their children from years of uncompensated labor.[256] Perhaps enslaved women also believed that their children had little chance of survival without them.

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[256] Ibid.

Fighting for Freedom—Military Black Service, 1775-1778

African American military service, although restricted to men, was also a crucial component of the northern emancipation process for all enslaved people, including women. This was especially true in Rhode Island, where a nearly all-black regiment was raised. An estimated 20,000 blacks fought in the Revolutionary War. In the South, the majority of blacks fought on the side of the British, while in the North, the vast majority of blacks fought with the patriots. North and South, African Americans were motivated by the promise of freedom, not political alliances. It was the British who first offered freedom in exchange for military service. It was out of fear and desperation that the northern state militias eventually offered the same. At least five thousand African Americans served in patriot armies, mostly in the North, during the American Revolution.[257] Black participation in the Revolutionary War effort challenged the institution of slavery, both figuratively and literally. Black military service undermined the premise of race-based slavery. How could patriot soldiers—freedom fighters—be unfit for freedom?

In 1775, recruiting officers for the Continental Army were ordered not to enlist "any stroller, negro or vagabond."[258] But this order did not dismiss those black men already enlisted in the Continental Army or restrict state militias from mustering black men. Still, it sent a very clear message—whites viewed the war for Independence as a white man's war. Military and political leaders of the rebellion, such as George Washington and John Adams, envisioned the war as fight for white freedom. Therefore,

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[257] The vast majority of African Americans threw their support behind the British. Lord Dunmore 1775 Proclamation of freedom in exchange for service inspired thousands of African Americans to join his ranks. Egerton, *Death or Liberty*, 6.

[258] See Pete Maslowski, "National Policy Toward the Use of Black Troops in the Revolution," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 73 Issue 1 (1972): 1-17.

they believed it should be fought by white men. Many white revolutionaries feared arming a potentially vengeful and oppressed class of free and enslaved blacks. They also feared isolating slaveholding patriots. More importantly, unrestricted African American service in the revolutionary cause would ultimately raise the issue of their incorporation as citizens in to the new nation.

African Americans served in integrated units in the Continental Army and state militias.[259] Most African Americans served in state militias. In 1777, after a devastating winter of loses and massive patriot desertions, Congress called for eighty-eight new battalions from the thirteen original states. States had trouble finding enough willing, able-bodied white men to enlist. So, in order to meet their quotas, most states instituted a draft and some even recruited slaves.[260] Slaveholders in Connecticut had the option of freeing their slaves and sending them as replacements for themselves or their sons. Massachusetts not only allowed black men to legally enlist, it made them eligible for the draft. In New Hampshire, both slaves and free blacks were enlisted. Slaves received their freedom in exchange for service and free blacks were granted the same bounties as white soldiers. In New Jersey, all able-bodied free men were recruited regardless of race. New York was among the last of the northern states to legally sanction black enlistment in 1781.[261] The New England states, with the smallest black populations, provided the largest number of black soldiers, while most African American soldiers in integrated units. Connecticut raised an all-black company of 700.[262] Most of its members were

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[259] Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), ix.

[260] Lorenzo J. Greene, "Some Observation on the Black Regiment of Rhode Island in the American Revolution," The Journal of Negro History 37, no. 2 (Apr., 1952): 142-172.

[261] Phillip Foner, *Blacks in the American Revolution* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 57-59.

[262] Berlin, *Many Thousands*, 230.

freed slave substitutes, and served as a separate unit until 1782.[263] Rhode Island, the region's smallest state, raised the nearly all-black regiment—the Rhode Island First.[264] The southern states were much more cautious about enlisting black men, fearing the potential impact on the institution of slavery. However, despite their fears, in 1780, the border states of Virginia and Maryland began enlisting black soldiers. While Maryland accepted the services of both slaves and free men, Virginia only enlisted free blacks.[265] Officials in South Carolina and Georgia refused to enlist any black men.[266]

Rhode Island, the smallest and least populous state, found it difficult to recruit white soldiers. Desperate to raise a new regiment, in 1780, General James Varum suggested raising a regiment of black slaves. Varum's experience in the field led him to support enlisting black men.[267] He understood that the shortage of soldiers was the primary problem facing the revolutionaries. Varum believed that a black battalion could be easily raised. He knew and acknowledged that free and enslaved blacks had been fighting officially and unofficially in the state militias from the very beginning of the conflict. Enslaved blacks had also volunteered by the thousands to fight for the British in exchange for freedom. General Varum's proposal was approved by Congress, which revoked the earlier prohibition on black and slave enlistments into the army.[268] Varum

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[263] Foner, *Blacks in the American Revolution*, 58.

[264] Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, 73.

[265] Foner, *Blacks in the American Revolution*, 59

[266] Quarles, The Negro in the American Revolution, viii-xi.

[267] Varum's experience in the field, he had commanded regiments in Rhode Island and Delaware, led him to support enlisting slaves. Paul C. Carlson, "James Mitchell Varum and the American Revolution," An Essay submitted to the Faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies, May 1, 1965 (Middletown, CT), 2-17.

[268] Lorenzo Greene, "Some Observations on the Black Regiment of Rhode Island," 150-153.

was more concerned about the practicalities and realities of winning the war, rather than the political and social repercussions of enlisting black soldiers.

Varum's proposal was met with criticism from Rhode Island slaveholders. John Northup, James Babcok Jr., Othneil Gorton, George Pierce, Sylvester Gardiner and Samuel Babcock, all Rhode Island slaveholders, sent an official letter of protest to the General Assembly against enlisting slaves to serve in the army. They argued that there were not a sufficient number of slaves "who would have an inclination to enlist, and would pass muster, to constitute a regiment."[269] They also doubted the willingness and ability of slaves to fight in exchange for freedom. Furthermore, they thought that enlisting slaves was insulting, embarrassing and hypocritical. They claimed it was wrong to use "a band slaves" to defend "the rights and liberties" of American citizens (who they understood to be white). Moreover, they did not want to be subjected to "the same kind of ridicule we so liberally bestowed upon them [the British], on account of Dunmore's regiment of blacks." Finally, they objected to the cost of purchasing the slaves, not to mention the resistance of hostile slaveholders, who they claimed had no desire to relinquish their property. They predicted that, "Great difficulties and uneasiness will arise in purchasing the negroes from their masters; and many of the masters will not be satisfied with any prices allowed."[270] While opponents of the slave enlistment act were unable to stop the law from passing, they were successful in limiting its scope. On June 10, 1778, just five months after slave enlistments began, they legally ended.[271] However, in defiance of the law, enlistments of slaves continued until the close of the war.[272]

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[269] John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. VIII 1776-1779* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Company, 1859), 361.

[270] Ibid.

[271] Ibid., 361.

[272] Greene, "Some Observation on the Black Regiment of Rhode Island," 163.

On February 14, 1778, the Rhode Island State Legislature, unable to fill their enlistment quota with able-bodied white men, authorized the creation of a slave regiment and offered slaves their freedom in exchange for military service. Rhode Island was the only northern state that to attempt to raise an all-black regiment; although Connecticut raised a large black company (700 black soldiers). The General Assembly declared, "that every able-bodied negro, mulatto, or Indian man slave in this State may enlist into either of the said two battalions, to serve during the continuance of the present war with Great Britain." [273] Enslaved Rhode Islanders immediately took advantage of the opportunity to enlist in return for their freedom. According to incomplete returns from the General Treasurer's Accounts, there were 74 enrollees between February 25, and October 14, 1778. There were 20 enlistments in April, 17 in May, 13 in June, 13 in July, 1 in August, 3 in September and 1 in October. The General Treasurer's Account lists 93 payments made to masters for 110 slaves.[274] The battalion mustered in on July 6, 1778. The unit included four companies with 19 commissioned officers, and 144 non-commissioned officers and privates. Another company was added to the battalion later in the year, which increased its numerical strength to 226 enlisted men and officers.[275] The Rhode Island

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[273] Bartlett, ed., *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. VIII 1776-1779*, 359.

[274] Greene, "Some Observations on the Black Regiment of Rhode Island," 157.

[275] The number of soldiers that served in the Rhode Island First is difficult to accurately nail down. Charles Battle, a local Rhode Island historian, claims two hundred and ten men were enlisted; historian Bernard Nalty asserts 150 men served; and according Debra Newman Ham's list of black servicemen, complied from the War Department Collection of Revolutionary Records, 115 blacks were enlisted in the Rhode Island regiment. On the other hand Philip Foner and Lorenzo Greene, relying on incomplete muster rolls, treasurer lists, payrolls and causalities, claimed there were between 225 and 250 black men enlisted. I am inclined towards the number given by Greene and Foner because they relied on not only War Department records, but also muster rolls, treasurer lists, payrolls and causalities. Charles A. Battle, *Negroes on The Island of Rhode Island* [microfilm] (Alexandria: Chadwick Healey Inc, 1987), 10, Debra Newman Ham, *List of Black Servicemen complied for the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Department Records* [microfilm] (Washington: National Archives and Records Service Administration, 1974) and Bernard Nalty "Record of Valor: Black Soldiers Before

First was predominantly but, not exclusively, black. The officers of the Rhode Island First were white and both whites and American Indians served as soldiers in the regiment.[276]

Black Rhode Island soldiers, unlike their counterparts in other state militias, were primarily employed as soldiers rather than as servants, cooks, manual laborers or foragers. The Rhode Island First fought for nearly five years in Rhode Island, New Jersey and New York. They were also one of the few units that enlisted for the duration of the war. At their first engagement, the Battle of Rhode Island, in 1778, the Rhode Island soldiers were commended for their tenacity and courage against an experienced Hessian regiment that was reinforced by British regulars. Dr. Harris, a white Revolutionary soldier, observed that

> Had they been unfaithful or even given away before the enemy all would have been lost. Three times in succession they were attacked with most desperate valor and fury by well disciplined and veteran troops, and three times did they successfully repel the assault and thus preserved our Army from capture.

The Rhode Island First went on to fight in battles at Red Bank, Yorktown and Fort Oswego.[277]

The soldiers of the Rhode Island First came from every walk of life—they were farmers, tradesmen and sailors. They ranged in age from their early teens to their mid-fifties, but the majority of them were in their teens or early twenties. Many of the soldiers

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Independence," *American Visions* 3 Issue 4 (1988): 18-27. Greene, "Some Observations on the Black Regiment of Rhode Island," 164-165.

[276]Black patriots motivated to fight by the promise of freedom served officially and unofficially. For example, in Massachusetts, black soldiers were enlisted in 1775 and 1776, although the state did not legally allow for their enlistment until 1778. It is nearly impossible to determine how many slaves or free blacks served in the various state militias because each state had different policies and timelines for accepting or rejecting black soldiers; and perhaps more importantly, each state had different policies for keeping track of how many Africans and African Americans served. Foner, *Blacks in the American Revolution*, 58.

[277] Battle, *Negroes on the Island of Rhode Island*, 14.

were married. According to the (incomplete) muster rolls, 82 non-commissioned officers and privates were listed as married. The vast majority of the soldiers came from the Narragansett and some of them were owned by prominent Rhode Island families. Cato Greene had been owned by Governor William Greene. Cato Vernon, York Champlin, July Champlin, Newport Champlin and Sharper Champlin all were owned by the dominant slave-trading Champlin family.[278] Mingo Robinson and Peter Hazard were both owned by large landholders in the Narragansett.[279] At the close of the war, the weary soldiers of the Rhode Island First walked home ill, bedraggled and impoverished. They had been paid in depreciated continental currency, and although they were Revolutionary War veterans, they were not recognized as citizens in the new nation.[280]

Advocates for Freedom—Private Manumissions and the Gradual Emancipation Law

The year 1775 was a watershed moment for Rhode Island slaves owned by Quakers. In that year alone, over 40 slaves were manumitted. By 1803, a total of 49 slaves had been manumitted by 29 Quakers.[281] But, while most these slaves were freed for religious reasons, some had to convince their masters to free them in return for loyal

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[278] Colonel Christopher Champlin (1707-1766) was a slaveholding planter in the Narragansett. In the 1750s his three sons Christopher , Robert and George moved to Newport to pursue careers as merchants. Christopher Champlin (1731-1805) the oldest son became a successful merchant, ship owner and financer. *Christopher Champlin Historical Note*, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island.

[279] Grenee, "Some Observation on the Black Regiment in Rhode Island," 165-166.

[280] Ibid., 172.

[281] Rhode Island Quakers keep a record of their members' manumissions; the manumissions were indexed according to the master's last name. *New England Yearly Meeting Collection*, Rhode Island Monthly Meeting, Slave Manumissions, 1708-1827, Box 10 [Microfilm Reel 1 of 7] Rhode Island Historical Society (Providence, Rhode Island).

service, as a death request, or in exchange for payment.[282] These reluctant manumissions suggest a more complex manumission process in which enslaved people did not simply receive, but also advocated for, their freedom. Such was the case for Cato Rivera, who was manumitted by Abraham Rivera in 1794 for faithful service. He purchased his mother, Phyllis, for $100.00, from Hannah Rivera in 1803. Why this purchase was indexed by church officials as a manumission is puzzling. Phyllis was not issued freedom papers. Rivera wrote,

> Know all men by these present that I Hannah Rivera for and in consideration of one hundred dollars well and truly paid to me by Cato Rivera, a free man and do by these present sell set over and deliver to him the said Cato Rivera my negro woman named Phyllis mother to the said Cato hereby releasing up all my rights property claim or demand I had _____ her as my slave forever to him the said Cato Rivera.

Phyllis was not manumitted; she was sold. Cato freed his mother from white mastery, but did so by purchasing her.

Quaker manumissions broke up black families; nearly one third (16 out of 49) of those manumitted were children (figure 6). A few children were freed outright, but most of them were apprenticed into adulthood. Most boys were kept as dependent servants until they were 21, while girls served until they were 18. For example, Daniel Weeden manumitted 10 slaves; however, the one child he freed was apprenticed until adulthood:

> Only Excepting and _____ to myself and my heirs and assigns the service of him the said negro [Ceasar] until the fourth day of the ninth month one thousand seven hundred and eighty four when he will (if living) have filled up and arrive to twenty one years of age until which period I do myself my heirs and assigns engage that he shall be clothed, victualed and educated in manner suitable for an apprentice of his age station and capacity.[283]

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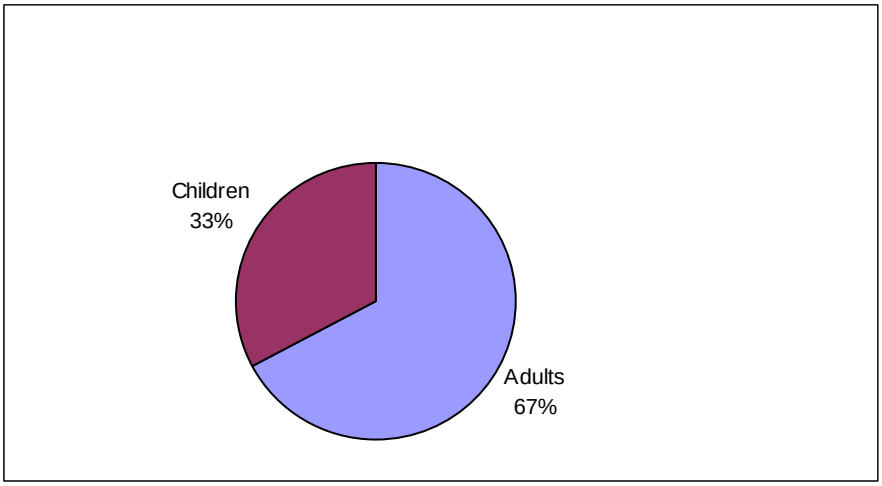
[282] Two slaves were freed in exchange for cash; two were freed in return for loyal service and one slave was freed as a death request; 18 were freed for religious reasons. See Table 4.

[283] Manumission Record of Daniel Weeden to Ceasar, New England Yearly Meeting Collection, Rhode Island Monthly Meeting, Slave Manumissions, 1708-1827, Box 10 [Microfilm Reel 1 of 7] Rhode Island Historical Society (Providence, Rhode Island).

Was Ceasar an orphan? Were his parents enslaved and thereby incapable of supporting him? Would he have been a financial burden to newly freed or free parents? The evidence suggests that children might have been a burden to newly freed parents. For example, John Bowen manumitted a "negro" named Experience, but apprenticed three minors, Benjamin, Daniel and Freelove. Such practices suggest that these Quakers assumed that whites were more capable parents or they believed that newly freed parents were in no position to provide for their children.[284] In either case, black children were separated from their parents. This practice, whether it was a result of paternalism or "compassion", split black families just as the Atlantic and internal slave trades had.

[284] Manumission Records of John Bowen to Experience, Benjamin, Daniel and Freelove, New England Yearly Meeting Collection, Rhode Island Monthly Meeting, Slave Manumissions, 1708-1827, Box 10 [Microfilm Reel 1 of 7] Rhode Island Historical Society (Providence, Rhode Island).

Figure 6: Percentages of Adults and Children Emancipation by Quakers, 1773-1803



Source: This graph was complied from indexed emancipations recorded during New England Yearly Meetings which were held in Rhode Island. New England Yearly Meeting Collection, Rhode Island Monthly Meeting, Slave Manumissions, 1708-1827, Box 10 [Microfilm Reel 1 of 7] Rhode Island Historical Society (Providence, Rhode Island)

While these Quaker manumissions were imperfect, they were nevertheless important to the emancipation process. The willingness of Quakers to free their slaves created an environment in which enslaved people could challenge their masters with the assistance of white allies. Furthermore, it was the Quakers who drafted Rhode Island's 1784 gradual emancipation law. The law was central to the emancipation process for African Americans, because it reflected the reality of the breakdown of the institution of slavery in Rhode Island. Moreover, it clearly indicated an end to perpetual servitude. However, the law also caused significant confusion and real conflict for black Rhode Islanders. Slaves born before 1784 remained slaves for life if they were not able to escape or were not privately manumitted. Black families became therefore "mixed," as enslaved or free parents often had bonded children and grandchildren. And frequently, the children of slave mothers were held to years of uncompensated labor.

It is difficult to establish an accurate population of slaves and free persons in Rhode Island during the revolutionary period. However, there are accurate counts of slaves before and after the war. In 1755 there were 1207 blacks (most of who were enslaved) in the Narragansett, 1,234 in Newport, 262 in Providence. In 1783 there were 702 blacks and mulattoes (statuses unknown) in the Narragansett, in 600 in Newport, and 252 in Providence. In 1790 there were 778 non-whites and 366 slaves in Newport and 778 free non-whites in Providence and 82 slaves.[285] In other words, prior to the Revolution most blacks in the population centers of Rhode Island were enslaved; however, after the war most blacks were free. Flight, military service, private manumissions and expulsions served to dismantle northern slavery.

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[285] Edgar McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 204-205.

White Experiences of Emancipation

The white experience of emancipation was profoundly different than that of African Americans; however, it was also as transformative. White Rhode Islanders lost their claim to mastery. Slaveholders lost the support of the state regarding their human property. They also watched their friends and neighbors voluntarily emancipate their slaves and were asked them to do the same. Emancipation was contested among white Rhode Islanders who approached gradual emancipation as one of three groups. The first group consisted of slaveholders, slave traders and merchants who traded in the West Indies—those directly involved in the business of slavery. The second group was made up of ardent abolitionists, most of whom held religious objections to the institution of slavery. The third group, which was by far the largest, consisted of those who were indirectly dependent on the businesses of slavery such as non-slaveholding tradesmen, businessmen and laborers. Among white Rhode Islanders, the conflict over emancipation was primarily between abolitionists and those directly involved in the business of slavery. It is important to note that abolitionists were in the minority. In the decades preceding and following the American Revolution abolitionism was largely a fringe movement among Quakers and Congregationalists. However, despite their differing views on the institution of slavery, the one thing most white Rhode Islanders had in common was their opposition to the British. Rhode Islanders were dependent on trade, and British attempts to restrict and tax that trade united Rhode Islanders regardless of their support, indifference or opposition to slavery.[286] When the British began to enforce trade law,

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[286] Rhode Islanders, like their southern counterparts, depended on the colonial imperial structure to support race-based slavery in their societies. However, attempts to regulate their access to slaves, slave produced products or foreign markets was met with fierce opposition. Sylvia Frey's critical critique of why aristocratic southern were so reluctant to join the patriot cause also explain how slaveholders, slave traders and merchants in Rhode Island reconciled their support of racial subordination and their support of the patriot freedom cause. Frey describes a triangular war in the South between two sets of whites (British and southern colonist) and 400,000 slaves. There were was an even more complex war in the North; there were pro-slavery

which restricted their access to the West Indian molasses that they used to make their major export (rum), most white Rhode Islanders committed to the patriot cause.[287]

It was during the Revolutionary period that Rhode Island slaveholders began to lose legal control over their slave property. In 1774, they were restricted from bringing more slaves into the colony, and in 1778, they witnessed the raising of the nearly all black battalion made up primarily of enslaved men. A year later, the Rhode Island General Assembly forbade slaveholders from selling slaves out of the state without their consent.[288] In 1784, white slave owners lost the rights to their future slave property when the Assembly declared all free children born to slave mothers after March 1 were free. Finally, in 1842, Rhode Island slaveholders lost complete control over their human property when the state abolished slavery. White advocates of black freedom did much more than propose, lobby and support legislation that chipped away at the institution of slavery in the state; they relinquished their own slave property, which helped to create an environment in which slaveholding was no longer commonplace or taken for granted.

Advocating for Black Freedom

By 1790, most white New Englanders did not support slaveholding within their own states.[289] This transformation from seventeenth and eighteenth century beliefs and practices was largely a result of the breakdown of slavery in the region. Slave flight,

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white colonists, anti-slavery white colonists, the British and finally 47,735 enslaved African Americans. See Frey, *Water from the Rock*.

[287] Their major objection to the 1764 Sugar Act was that it restricted their access to foreign ports in the West Indies; and they received the vast majority of their rum from non-British islands. Rhode Islanders were dependent on trade with the West Indies not only as slave traders but molasses importers. The number one trading good in Rhode Island was rum; they used rum to buy goods for neighboring colonies as well as purchase slaves along the West African Coast. Bartlett, ed., *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. VIII 1776-1779*, 379.

[288] Ibid., 618.

[289] Sweet, "'More Than Tears,'" 119-121.

military emancipations, private manumissions and gradual emancipation laws had severely eroded the institution of slavery in New England. However, it was the Quakers who were most instrumental in legalizing emancipation in the region. The Quakers were the first religious group, in the Atlantic World, to question and prohibit slaveholding among their members.

The first Quaker missionaries came to North America in the 1650s. They were heavily concentrated in the northern colonies of Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and New Jersey. By the mid-seventeenth century, the Society of Friends was one of the five major denominations in British North America.[290] The Society of Friends left England to escape religious persecution, and to take advantage of economic opportunities in the North American colonies. While the history of Quakers in Pennsylvania, the first Quaker colony, is well known, their existence in Rhode Island is much more obscure.[291] Rhode Island Quakers, unlike their counterparts in neighboring states, were accepted into mainstream society. They settled in Rhode Island as early as 1650, and by the 1660s several prominent Newport families had converted. Quakers quickly gained prominent social and economic status in the colony. Within two decades, they made up a significant minority in the Rhode Island the General Assembly, and a Friend was elected Governor. They were such a dominant force in local politics that they were able to enact a provision allowing for conscientious objection from militia duty. The Quakers were voted out of office when Metacom's War (also known as King Philip's War) broke out, and

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[290] It is difficult to assess how many Quakers were in British North America. However, it is clear that the Quaker population was heavily concentrated in Pennsylvania and New England—especially Rhode Island. They were an estimated 145,000 Quakers in Pennsylvania in 1775; and in Philadelphia one seventh of the population professed to be Friends. Arthur J. Mekeel, The *Quakers and the American Revolution* (York: Sessions Book Trust, 1996), 2, 388.

[291] Charles the II granted Pennsylvania to William in payment for a debt; the King also hoped the colony would serve as magnet for troublesome Quakers throughout the colony. The vast majority of colonial settlers in Pennsylvania were Quakers. Hugh Barbour and J. William Frost, *The Quakers* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988), 74-75.

conscientious objection was repealed. Nevertheless, they remained politically engaged. There were several Quaker governors in the eighteenth century, and Quakers maintained significant minorities in the General Assembly. The religion continued to grow in New England, and by 1772 there were forty seven individual congregations in the region.[292] In Rhode Island, Quakers became the driving political force behind the 1784 gradual emancipation law. However, it had taken them nearly a century to forbid slaveholding among their members.

From the seventeenth century through the first half of the eighteenth century, there was no outright public objection to slaveholding from any group or organization, except the enslaved, in North America. With very few exceptions the institution was not questioned; it was accepted by white colonists, including Quakers, as a social and economic necessity.[293] Throughout the British colonies in North America and the Caribbean, Quakers held slaves. Like the Puritans and Anglicans, they saw no conflict between their faith and slaveholding.[294] The Quaker objection to slavery evolved over time. It took over a century for Quakers to forbid slaveholding among their members. They began questioning slavery in the 1650s, and by the 1770s most meetings (regional organizing bodies) forbade their members to buy or sell slaves.[295] The basic belief system of Quakers made them the mostly likely Christians to question slavery. Then, as

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[292] Roger Williams disliked what he perceived as dogmatic teachings in Quakerism; in fact, he considered Quakers just as bothersome as Puritans. Ibid. , 53-54.

[293]There were a couple notable exceptions. In 1688 a group of Mennonite farmers in Germantown, Pennsylvania (a Quaker Colony) protested slaveholding because they believed it was un-Christian to trade and hold slaves. In 1700 Samuel Sewall, a puritan old-time a Congregationalist published, "The Selling of Joseph," which argued that slavery and the slave trade was a form of man-stealing which was clearly prohibited in the Bible. David S. Lovejoy, "Samuel Hopkins: Religion, Slavery and the Revolution" *The New England Quarterly*, 40, no. 2 (June, 1976) , 228.

[294]Thomas Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 4-7.

[295] Ibid., 49,59.

now, Quakers believed in spiritual equality—that every person (regardless of race or status) is capable of receiving the inner-light.[296]

Throughout the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century, Quakers believed that they could stay in good standing with God as long as they treated their slaves well. They believed they were "good" masters because they made sure their slaves were adequately clothed and fed. Many Quakers educated their slaves and brought them to meetings.[297] However, through their criticism and critique of the slave trade, they eventually came to believe that slaveholding was inconsistent with Christianity. Quakers first critiqued the trafficking of slaves, and finally acknowledged that all slaveholding supported that traffic.[298] Consequently, most Quakers came to the conclusion that no Christian could in good conscience support or participate in such a horrendous trade. Finally, the political rhetoric of the revolution bolstered their protests. Throughout the revolutionary period, New England Quakers melded their beliefs in spiritual equality to their support of social and civic equality.[299]

The Quakers became the first religious group to mandate manumission in the Atlantic World. In 1769, Rhode Island Quakers, at a meeting held in Greenwich, Rhode Island, appointed a committee to arrange manumissions. The committee supported a new query which forbade transferring slaves in any manner except to free them. Quakers used queries (questions) to challenge their members to reflect on the spirituality of their actions. Finally, in 1773, New England Quakers forbade any member to hold slaves. At a meeting in Smithfield, Rhode Island, Stephen Hopkins, a former Rhode Island Governor

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[296] The inner-light refers to the Quaker belief that the light of Christ is in every man and woman. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 1. David S. Lovejoy, "Samuel Hopkins: Religion, Slavery and the Revolution" *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Jun.,1976) p.229.

[297] Nash, *Freedom By Degrees*, 42.

[298] Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 39-42.

[299] See Lovejoy, "Samuel Hopkins: Religion, Slavery and the Revolution."

and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was expelled for refusing to manumit his "old negro servant, the one remaining slave who was suitable for freedom."[300] Quakers manumitted their slaves, because they believed slaveholding was "contrary to true Christianity," and because they were "willing to do to others as I would others thou so to me." [301]

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[300] Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 78-79.

[301] Rhode Island Quakers keep a record of their members' manumissions; the manumissions were indexed according to the master's last name. New England Yearly Meeting Collection, Rhode Island Monthly Meeting, Slave Manumissions, 1708-1827, Box 10 [Microfilm Reel 1 of 7] Rhode Island Historical Society (Providence, Rhode Island).

Table 9: Quaker Manumissions in Rhode Island 1773 – 1803 *children

Year	Emancipator	Number of slaves Emancipated	Reason for Emancipation	Location
1773	Joseph Jacob	1	Religious	Newport
1775	William Anthony	1	Religious	Portsmouth
1775	Thomas Brownell	1	Religious	Portsmouth
1775	John Bowen	4***	Religious	Tiverton
1775	James Coggshell	3	Religious	Portsmouth
1775	Cornell Walter	2*	Religious	Portsmouth
1775	William Cozzens	3***	Religious	North Kingstown
1775	Damartis Fowler	1*	Moral	Jamestown
1775	Weston Hicks	1	Religious	Portsmouth
1775	Issac Lawton	1	Religious	Portsmouth
1775	Robert Lawton	1*	Religious	Newport
1775	Mary Marsh	1*	Religious	Newport
1775	Clarke Rodman	1*	Religious	Newport
1775	James Sisson	3**	Religious	Portsmouth
1775	Elizabeth Taylor	1	Religious	Newport
1775	Sarah Thurston	1*	?	Newport
1775	Philip Wanton	2	Religious	Newport
1775	John Wanton	1	Religious	Newport

Table 9: Continued

1776	Daniel Weeden	10*	Religious	Jamestown
1778	Jonathan Easton	1*	?	Newport
1783	Sarah Wanton	1	Death Request	Newport
1790	Christopher Marden	1	Purchased for $500	Newport
1794	Abraham Rivera	1	In Return for faithful service	Newport

Source: Table 5 was complied from an manumission recorded at New England Society of Friends Yearly Meetings. New England Yearly Meeting Collection, Rhode Island Monthly Meeting, Slave Manumissions, 1708-1827, Box 10 [Microfilm Reel 1 of 7] Rhode Island Historical Society (Providence, Rhode Island)

The manumission papers of the Rhode Island Quakers were quite similar. A typical manumission certificate read:

> To all Christian people to whom these present shall come, know you that I Robert Lawton of the Newport in the county of Newport and Colony of Rhode Island, have in my possession on Negro Boy called Samuel, who according to the law and custom of said colony is deemed a slave and as my property but believing it to be contrary to true Christianity, and the divine injunction of the author thereof to hold mankind as my property or continue them in a state whereby they may be subjected to slavery after my decease, and in consideration thereof and together causes met thereunto moving. I do for my self and my heirs executive administrator and Assigns Manumit Release and Discharge, him the said Negro from a state of slavery and hereby declare him to be henceforth free as amply and fully so, as if had been Born of free parents.[302]

The authors of these manumissions were careful and deliberate. They made sure that their estates had no claims to the slaves they manumitted. Such practices suggest that they did not necessarily trust their heirs to fulfill their wishes. Furthermore, they declared their human property "free as amply and fully, so as if had been Born of free parents." They clearly understood slavery and freedom to be inheritable and permanent conditions. Consequently, they wanted to make sure that the slaves they manumitted were recognized as completely free persons—persons who owed service to no one and whose children would also be free.

These Quakers not only manumitted their slaves, they were also active abolitionists. And the fact they had manumitted their slaves gave them credence in the abolitionist movement; they asked of others only what they had done themselves. Following the American Revolution many Quakers, especially those in New England, were involved in abolitionist activities and organizations. They became increasingly vocal about their opposition to the institution of slavery, especially the slave trade. They published critiques and sent petitions to local governments and the federal government.

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302 Manumission record of Robert Lawton to Samuel, New England Yearly Meeting Collection, Rhode Island Monthly Meeting, Slave Manumissions, 1708-1827, Box 10 [Microfilm Reel 1 of 7] Rhode Island Historical Society (Providence, Rhode Island).

Rhode Island Quakers, too were concerned about the immorality of slavery. They believed that slave trading and slaveholding in the New World was "the most barbarous" in history.[303] They asserted that both history and the Bible declared that the entire nation would be punished for supporting and accepting such an immoral institution.[304] For Quakers, ending abolition was not just about personal salvation, but saving a nation from divine damnation.

Samuel Hopkins, a Congregational minister, was also instrumental in Rhode Island abolitionist movement. He was born in Connecticut in 1721, and was an unlikely abolitionist. In fact, he probably would not have taken up the cause had he not been removed from his congregation in Great Barrington, Massachusetts to a post in Newport, Rhode Island. [305] The commonality and brutality of slaveholding and slave trading in Newport pushed him towards abolitionism.[306] Hopkins served as pastor of Newport's First Congregational Church from 1770 to 1803, and during this period he became one of the most renowned abolitionists in New England. Fellow Congregationalist Sarah Osborn became one of his closest confidants. Osborn had long embraced abolitionism. She ran a school for African Americans in her home, it was one of the first schools for black children in Rhode Island. It was Osborn who introduced Hopkins to the abolitionist

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303 "To the Printer of the United States Chronicle You Are Desired to Re-Publish the Enclosed," United States Chronicle, October 27, 1784, Volume 1, Issue 44, Page [1].

304 "To the Printer of the United States Chronicle You Are Desired to Re-Publish the Enclosed," *United States Chronicle*, October 27, 1784, Volume 1, Issue 44, Page [1].

305 John Ferguson, Memoir of the Life and Character of Rev. Samuel Hopkins D.D. Formerly the Pastor of the First Congregational Church in Newport, Rhode Island (New York: Leonard Kimball, 1830), 9-14.

306 In 1769, due largely to his strict Calvinistic beliefs, Hopkins lost the support of his congregants in Massachusetts. They were so disillusioned with him that they refused to contribute to his salary. Hopkins planned to farm to support his family. However, before he could plant his first field, he received an invitation to preach in Newport. Sheryl A. Kujawa, "'The Path of Duty Plain': Samuel Hopkins, Sarah Osborn and Revolutionary Newport," *Rhode Island History* 58 Issue 3 (2000): 75-89, Joseph Conforti, "Samuel Hopkins and the Revolutionary antislavery Movement," *Rhode Island History* 38 no. 2 (1979): 39-49.

movement. Their religious convictions, combined with their political ideals led them to both become dedicated abolitionists. Hopkins came to believe that British tyranny was a result of the sins (slaveholding and slave trading) of colonists.

Slaveholding and slave trading practices in the city of Newport shaped Hopkins's opposition to the institution of slavery. Prior to his settlement in Newport, Hopkins had been unconcerned with the institution of slavery. He had been comfortable with his mentor's slaveholding and had enslaved people in his own Massachusetts household, since slaves were often put at the disposal of ministers as part of their salaries. Hopkins' transformation took place during the first few years he lived in Newport.[307] He attempted to atone for his own sins and the sins of the nation by educating "pious" blacks, whom he privately tutored; he wanted to train them as missionaries for congregations in Africa. Hopkins not only trained them free of charge. He was also directly responsible for helping at least one of them gain their freedom.[308]

Hopkins also lobbied the federal government on behalf the enslaved. In 1776, he sent a pamphlet to Congress highlighting the hypocrisy between slave holding and the Declaration of Independence. This pamphlet was later used as the basis of the constitution for the Abolition Society of New York.[309] Hopkins and his congregation officially denounced slavery in 1784.[310] Hopkins not only preached against slavery, which was fairly safe to do among a congregation too poor to own slaves, but he also tried to convince wealthy slaveholders and other ministers to join his cause. He was successful with at least one local slaveholder. Dr. Bellamy claimed that he treated his

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[307] See Conforti, "Samuel Hopkins and the Revolutionary Antislavery Movement."

[308] W. Bryan Rommel-Ruiz, "Colonizing the Black Atlantic: The African Colonization Movements in Postwar Rhode Island and Nova Scotia," *Slavery and Abolition* 27 no. 3 (December 2006): 349-365. Ferguson, *Memoir of the Life and Character*, 87.

[309] Ferguson, *Memoir of the Life and Character*, 88.

[310] See Conforti, "Samuel Hopkins and the Revolutionary Antislavery Movement."

slave so well that he did not desire his freedom. In response, Hopkins challenged him to offer his loyal slave his freedom. Dr. Bellamy consented and was surprised to find out his slave did indeed desire his freedom, which he then granted.[311]

Abolitionists, like Hopkins and the Quakers, were instrumental in creating an environment in which slaveholding was increasingly a topic of public critique. Slave flight, military emancipations, Quaker manumissions and the activities individuals like Samuel Hopkins and Sarah Osborn tore at the fabric of slavery in Rhode Island. The institution of slavery was dependent upon public acceptance, and when significant portions of a society began to question the institution, the entire institution was weakened.

Losing Mastery—Importation restrictions and Black Military Service

In 1774, the Rhode Island General Assembly forbade the importation of "Negroes" into the colony; they claimed that "those who are desirous of enjoying all the advantages of liberty themselves, should be willing to extend personal liberty to others." According to the law any slave brought in the colony after June 1774 would be "rendered immediately free, so far as respects personal freedom, and the enjoyment of private property, in the same manner as the native Indian." Those who violated the law received a £100 fine.[312] At the same time, the law also protected the right of visitors to bring their human property into the colony for any period of time, provided they take their slave property with them when they leave. Furthermore, the law did not extend to slaves

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311 Ferguson, *Memoir of the Life and Character*, 85-86.

312 *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. VII 1770-1776*, ed. John Russell Bartlett (Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Co, 1862) , 251.

brought into the colony on locally owned vessels, whose captains were unable to sell them in the West Indies. The law stipulated that under such circumstances:

> the owner of such negro or mulatto slave give bond to the general treasure of the said, with ten days in the sum of £100 for each and every such negro or mulatto slave so brought in, that such negro or mulatto slave shall be exported out of the colony, within one year from the date of such bond; if such negro or mulatto be alive, and in a condition to be removed.[313]

The members of the Rhode Island General Assembly were sending a clear message. They did not want any more African slaves in the colony. However, they also wanted to make sure they did not damage the business of slave traders, hence the year reprieve afforded to them. Such a law was possible in Rhode Island because its residents were more dependent on the businesses of slavery than on slave labor. During the Revolutionary War, Rhode Island merchants were the last Americans to stop slave trading; and after the Revolution, they were the first to resume it.[314] In other words, only violent conflict and occupation could prevent local merchants from pursuing their trade in African slaves. As late as 1774, Captain William Gardner set sail for the coast of Africa in the *Sally* to procure a cargo of slaves; ten years later, within months of the cease fire, Rhode Island merchants sailed five ships to Africa.[315] The 1774 prohibition on "the importation of Negroes," restricted a minor component of Rhode Island's business of slavery. It was the first law to limit the right of slaveholders to acquire more slaves; however it would not be the last law restricting the rights of slave owners and undermining white mastery.

Northern states overrode the authority of masters by enlisting slaves against the will of their owners. In Rhode Island, the mustering of the Rhode Island First, the mostly

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[313] Ibid, 251-253.

[314] Elizabeth Donnan, "The New England Slave Trade After the Revolution," *The New England Quarterly* 3 no 2. (April., 1930): 252.

[315] Eltis, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*.

black and formerly enslaved regiment, posed a direct challenge to local racial ideology; black men were no longer dependents but soldiers and freedom fighters. The state's need for manpower superseded the authority of masters.[316] The state of Rhode Island was required to provide only two regiments, but they had severe difficulties meeting their quota. British occupation of Newport, which began in 1776, made finding enough white men for two battalions nearly impossible. Furthermore, the nearly bankrupt state could not offer any bounties or incentives to potential recruits. British occupation had all but crippled Newport's local commerce and the prosperous dairy farms of the Narragansett. Commerce was at a standstill, and white men were reluctant to leave their communities in such dire straits. Moreover, the state had not paid its active soldiers in months.[317] Finding willing white men to fight was therefore extremely difficult.

The slave enlistment act affected all slaveholders in Rhode Island. If an enslaved man wanted to enlist he only had to present himself and pass muster—his master was compensated, but not allowed to forbid him to enlist.[318] Slave enlistments were the first step in the legal dismantlement of the institution of slavery, which was certainly an unintended consequence. Masters lost control over their enlisted property. Their mastery was dependent on support from the state, but the state's need for manpower diminished masters' authority. The slave enlistment act declared, "That every slave so enlisting shall, upon his passing muster by Col. Christopher Greene, be immediately discharged

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316 While these previous oppressed men were commissioned to fight for freedom, their monetary value was also assessed. A committee of five consisting of one representative from each county was to set a price for each man after they passed muster. Slaves were valued between 30 and 120 pounds, depending on their skill, age and ability. Bartlett, John Russell Bartlett, ed. *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. VII 1776-1779* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Company, 1859), 360.Greene, "Some Observation of the Black Regiment," 166.

317 Greene, "Some Observations on the Black," 148.

318 Bartlett, ed. *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England V. VIII 1776-1779,* 359.

from the service of his master or mistress, and be absolutely FREE." Although Rhode Island slaveholders lost control over their human property, the state pledged to compensate them for the loss of their property. Slave owners were paid a top price of £120 for the most valuable slave. A committee of five men from of the state's counties was created to evaluate the worth of slave soldiers. The passage of the act also required a reversal of the 1729 law which stipulated that masters had to post a £100 bond to manumit their slave. In their enlistment of black soldiers, the Rhode Island General Assembly simultaneously respected and restricted the rights of slave holders.[319] There were, undoubtedly, cases in which slaves who wanted to enlist were prevented from doing so by their masters. Slaveholders used force, trickery or threat of retaliation to prevent their slaves from enlisting. Hazard Potter, a slave owner from South Kingstown, tried to convince his slaves not to enlist by telling them that they were only going to be used as manual laborers, put on the front lines or sold to the West Indies.[320]

The performance of black soldiers, free and enslaved, changed the intention and scope of military emancipations. Military service in exchange for freedom was not intended as an attack on the institution of slavery, but rather was a necessary consequence of manpower shortage. However, the act stripped masters of their rights. Though this emancipation act was limited to men and respected the property rights of slaveholders, it forever changed the status and image of African Americans in the state. Moreover, military emancipation undermined the racial ideology of a white master class. Whites lost the support of the law that had guaranteed their right to hold people of African descent in perpetual bondage.

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[319] Ibid., 359-360.

[320] Greene, "Some Observations on the Black Regiment," 161.

Legalizing Freedom—The Gradual Emancipation Law of 1784

What was most surprising about the passage of the gradual emancipation law in Rhode Island was that it was not formally debated in the General Assembly. On Monday December 4, 1783, the assembly appointed a committee "to take into consideration a petition [by Moses Brown] preferred unto this Assembly by a committee of the people called Quakers, respecting the abolition of slavery." Three months later, on the last Monday of February 1784, the assembly passed a comprehensive gradual emancipation law.[321] There is no evidence of debates, letters or petitions sent to the general assembly in opposition of the gradual emancipation law. The fight over gradual emancipation was fought in the individual towns and homes of Rhode Island. Consequently, once the Quakers had gathered enough signatures in support of emancipation the general assembly simply passed the measure.

Gradual emancipation in Rhode Island, failed to excite debate because white Rhode Islanders invested primarily in the businesses of slavery, rather than slaveholding. They were dependent on the institution of slavery outside the borders of Rhode Island, especially in the West Indies and the American South. Slaveholding merchants, slave traders and farmers were also most dependent on slavery outside of Rhode Island. While their slaves had enriched them, they were not solely dependent on their labor. Consequently, the loss their slave labor did not result in economic instability. Furthermore, gradual emancipation allowed slaveholders to keep their slaves and granted them access to the labor of the children of slave mothers for decades. African Americans

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[321] The General Assembly appointed Thomas Wells, John Smith, Benjamin Howland, Stephen Steere, Joseph Noyes, Nathan Miller and Abraham Lippitt to report on the matter of emancipation. I have been unable to find any such report in the colonial records. Bartlett, ed. *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. 1X. 1780-1783*, 735 and Bartlett, ed., *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England V. X. 1784-1792*, 7.

and white Quakers were able to successfully push for gradual emancipation because white Rhode Islanders were more invested in the businesses of slavery (the slave trade and West Indian trade) than they were in slaveholding.

Rhode Island Quakers, like their counterparts in Pennsylvania, were instrumental in successfully lobbying for gradual emancipation.[322] In January of 1783, several Quakers presented the Rhode Island Assembly with a petition "for the gradual Abolition of the Slavery of the Negroes in this state." Their reasoning was simple and direct; "Owners of such Negro Slaves as are Healthy and capable of supporting themselves might be authorized to manumit them." They also suggested that "in Case of former slaves becoming Indigent that they should be considered as other paupers, and be provided for accordingly."[323] In other words, they argued that freed people should be entitled to the same considerations as all other white citizens if they should ever need public aid.

The first, second and third emancipation bill in Rhode Island were all drafted by Moses Brown, a former slaveholder and Quaker convert. In 1775, Brown presented an emancipation bill to the Rhode Island General Assembly. It was rejected outright. The second bill, which he presented in 1783, was accompanied by signatures he had gathered from town council members across the state. This bill not only called for an immediate end to slavery, but also fined anyone involved in the Atlantic slave trade. This version of the bill was also rejected, two to one. A few months later a revised version of Brown's bill won the support of the Providence Town Council by a vote of 108 to 58. The revised bill, jointly sponsored by black veterans and white Quakers, called for a gradual end to

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[322] Nash, *Freedom By Degrees*, 75.

[323] John Russell Bartlett, ed. *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. 1X. 1780-1783(* Providence: Knowles, Anthony and Company, 1859), 738 and "Providence, January 1, 1784," United States Chronicle Volume 1 Issue 1 Page 3, Providence Rhode Island, January 1, 1784.

slavery and did not mention the Atlantic slave trade. This bill passed the General Assembly in spite the opposition of some Assembly members, and from Moses Brown's brother, John Brown, in particular.[324] John was a successful merchant, and although he sent few slave ships during his career, he was intimately involved in the business of slavery as supplier to plantations in the West Indies.

The 1784 gradual emancipation law was a turning point in the fight for emancipation in Rhode Island, because it brought a legal end to inheritable slavery in the state. In February 1784, the Rhode Island assembly added that all children born to slave mothers after the first of March were declared free; however, they were indentured to the town of their birth until they reached adulthood.[325] It is important to note that legislators called only for an eventual end to slavery. The act immediately freed no one, and those born before March 1784 were to remain slaves for life. Furthermore, town governments were encouraged to "bind out such children [those freed by the 1784 gradual emancipation act] as apprentices" to cover the costs of their upbringing.[326] Both individuals and families faced an uncertain freedom. Such legislation was possible, in part, because white Rhode Islanders were not dependent on employing slave labor in their state. Instead, they invested in supplying slave societies with slaves, food and goods. Consequently, while local slave traders were sending and planning slave trading voyages, local legislators were passing a bill to phase out slaveholding in the state of Rhode Island.

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[324] Egerton, *Death or Liberty*, 109-110. Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 120-121 and Charles Rappleye, *Sons of Providence: The Brown Brothers, the Slave Trade and the American Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 226-229.

[325] Bartlett, ed., *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. X. 1784-1792*, 7.

[326] Individual towns were responsible for supporting and educating freed children until age 18 for females and 21 for males. Ibid., 7.

Less than a year after the gradual emancipation law was passed, the General Assembly amended the law to protect non-slaveholding whites, who were the overwhelming majority, from potential public burdens. Masters, and not towns, were to be responsible for supporting and educating freed children. In addition, the age of "service" was extended to 21 for females, which meant three more additional years of uncompensated labor. Finally, if the child's mother was emancipated before the child's twenty-first birthday, the owner was not to be held responsible for the education or support of the child.[327]

Rhode Island's gradual emancipation law had a significant flaw: it lacked enforcement.[328] Consequently, the burden of proof rested on the freed persons. Legislators depended upon the integrity and honesty of the master class to police themselves. No committee or organization was appointed to keep track of those children who were to be "indentured" and not enslaved. No funds were set aside to ensure that masters followed the law. Other than personal integrity, the threat of a freedom suit, and informal public accountability, there was no deterrent to simply ignoring the law.

Despite the lack of enforcement or oversight, some masters took the law seriously and even expanded upon its principles. On the day the gradual emancipation law went into effect, Nab, an enslaved thirty year old woman, was manumitted by her master Henry Reynolds of South Kingston. In his manumission Reynolds specifically referred to the 1784 Gradual emancipation law. He aligned himself with the broader intentions of the law—to dismantle the institution of slavery. Reynolds manumitted Nab, in the name of

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[327] Ibid., 132.

[328] The state failed to appoint a committee or commission to ensure that slaveholders adhered to the law. The Providence Society for Promoting the abolition of Slavery was a self appointed gatekeeper of the Gradual Emancipation Law. This private organization did the job the state should have been doing. They brought suit against questionable claims of ownership they policed their neighbors attempts to sell indentured and apprenticed African Americans out of the state. Providence Abolition Society Minute Meetings, Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

the law, although the law did not refer to those born before 1784. It is peculiar that a slaveholder from South Kingston, a bastion of slaveholding, would freely and willingly manumit his slave. There was no reference to an indenture agreement or a cash settlement.[329] This manumission points to the unintended consequences of gradual emancipation laws.

Three years after passing the gradual emancipation law, Rhode Island legislators further forbade their citizens (who still dominated the North American trade in slaves) from participating in the Atlantic slave trade.[330] Connecticut was the only other northern state to prohibit its citizens from participating in the slave trade. The authors of the 1787 act explicitly connected slave trading and slaveholding in Rhode Island. They claimed that abolition could not be completed without bringing the slave trade to an end. The majority of Assembly members deemed trafficking in Africans as "inconsistent with justice, and the principles of humanity, as well as the laws of nature and that more enlightened and civilized sense of freedom which has of late prevailed." The members of the governing body of Rhode Island further declared that:

> no citizen of this state, or other person residing within the same, shall, for himself or any other person whatsoever, either as master, factor, or owner of any vessel, directly or indirectly import or transport, buy or sell, or receive on board their vessel with intent to cause to be imported or transported from their native country, any of the natives or inhabitants of any state or kingdom in that part of the world called Africa, as slaves, or without their voluntary consent.[331]

Unlike the 1784 gradual emancipation law, the 1787 legislation put stiff penalties into place to deter and punish those who broke the slave-trading law. Any resident convicted

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[329] A manumission (Mar 1 1784) of Nab (a Negro Woman) by Henry Reynolds in 1784. Reynolds Family Papers (South Kingstown), Mss 663 folder dated 1774-1787. Rhode Island Historical Society Providence Rhode Island.

[330] Bartlett, ed., *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England V. X. 1784-1792,* 262.

[331] Ibid., 262.

of importing or transporting African slaves was fined £100 and those found guilty of a smuggling a vessel of slaves were fined £1000.[332] The act reveals that abolitionists reveals had considerable power in the General Assembly.

However, white Rhode Islanders remained divided on the issued slave trading. The Brown brothers of Providence provide the most salient example of the division over slavery in Rhode Island. Moses Brown drafted the 1784 gradual emancipation law, while his brother John Brown staunchly opposed the bill. Moses Brown, who dedicated the latter half of his life to abolition and ending the slave trade, was a founding member of the Providence Abolition Society. The brothers' disputes over the morality of the slave trade became public in a series of opinion pieces in the *Providence Gazette*. In an attempt to promote the Providence Abolition Society, Moses Brown put an ad in the local paper introducing the organization and calling for an end to slavery and the slave trade. Soon after, an editorial piece, widely believed to be written by his brother, ridiculed the society and its members.[333] However, the height of their disagreement came in the form of lawsuits, the first in 1790, and the second in 1795. In 1790 a black sailor named James Tom told members of the Providence Abolition Society that John Brown was illegally holding him as a slave. The society filed suit with the full support of Moses Brown. John Brown responded by imprisoning Tom in one of his ships. In order to free Tom, the society agreed to drop the suit if John let him go. John agreed.[334] Five years later, in 1795, the society pursued the legal prosecution of John Brown, again for violating a federal ban restricting slave trading. John was not alone in violating the law. Disregard

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[332] Ibid.

[333] *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, February 14 and 21 1789; March 14, 1789. *United States Chronicle*, February 26 and 28 1789; March 26, 1789.

[334] Sweet, "'More Than Tears,'" 119-120.

for the law was a necessity for many prominent businessmen in the community.[335] The case was both a victory and a defeat for the society. While John Brown was the first American slave trader prosecuted in federal court, he was ultimately acquitted and the Providence Abolition Society was held responsible for the court cost.[336]

In Rhode Island, the conflict between those who supported abolition and those who were economically invested in the business of slavery played out in many arenas. In 1789 James Tallmadge, a student at Rhode Island College (later renamed Brown University), delivered a scathing indictment of slaveholding and trading at his commencement exercises. Tallmadge argued that that any U.S. citizen who participated in the slave trade made a mockery of the American Revolution and the Republic. He referred to them as "enemies of liberty."[337] He declared that slaveholders and traders should be regarded as dangerous criminals:

> If capital punishment is inflicted upon the villain who attacks and robs a man of his property upon the highway, what punishment can be devised sufficiently great for those who traceries the wide Atlantic and spread death and desolation on the African shore, who not only robe its unoffending peoples of their property, but of their liberty and lives and chain them down in ignominious servitude [338]

Tallmadge argued that race-based slavery debased all men; through it, "mankind would be at once solved into a universal monarch with some weak punny white faced creation for their sovereign and those who colour was farthest removed from white though a

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[335] See Rappleye, *Sons of Providence*.

[336] In 2003, the President of Brown University Ruth Simmons appointed a steering committee to investigate the University's involvement in the slave trade. James Campbell was appointed the chair committee; he is a professional historian and professor at Brown University. The committee completed their report in 2006; it is available online. James Campbell, "Slavery and Justice Report of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice," 2006 <http://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/> (2006), 21.

[337] James Tallmadge, *An Oration upon the infringement of rights of man, to be delivered at the commencement of Rhode Island College,* (September 1798), 5. John Carter Brown Library, (Providence Rhode Island).

[338] Ibid., 13.

Newton, or Franklin, and Adams or a Washington would be reduced to the most abject slavery."[339] What made his commencement speech particularly surprising was his College's connection to slave trading. The College's first president, Reverend James Manning, was a slaveholder and approximately thirty members of the Brown Corporation (who endowed the university) either owned or traded slaves. Slaveholders and traders, most notably the Brown, Lopez, and Rivera families, donated the land, money and buildings for the College.[340] However, abolitionists like Moses Brown had also contributed to the founding of the school, which mostly likely explains why abolitionist rhetoric was tolerated.

In 1789, dissatisfied with the limitations and progress of the gradual emancipation law, local abolitionists established the secular Providence Abolitionist Society. Moses Brown played a key role in the creation and mission of the society. Although the leadership was dominated by Quakers like Moses, the society was open to all who opposed the institution of slavery and the slave trade in particular. In their incorporation papers society members declared:

> And as by the African Slave-Trade a system of slavery replete with human misery is erected and carried on it is incumbent on them to endeavour the suppression of the unrighteous commerce[341]

The group formally incorporated in June of 1790 as the *Providence Society for Promoting the abolition of Slavery*, for the relief of persons unlawfully held in bondage, and for improving the condition of the African race. There were over 100 members from Rhode Island, 68 from Massachusetts and three from Connecticut; there is no evidence to

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[339] Ibid., An Oration, 6 and 7.

[340] See James Campbell, *Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice,* <http://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/events/mor e.html> (2006).

[341] 20 February 1789, Providence Abolition Society Minute Meetings, "Yearly Meeting of Friends for New England in Providence" MSS NEYM. Rhode Island Historical (Society, Providence).

suggest that any of the members were African Americans.[342] The society was determined to be active, not simply ideological. They wanted to pursue an end to the slave trade and slaveholding, and address racial oppression. For the members of this abolition society, slave traders and slaveholders were not bad men critiqued from a distance, but rather neighbors, friends and family. The members of the Providence Society wanted to prosecute state residents who continued to participate in the slave trade and those who held or sold slaves illegally. Society members authorized their treasurer to bring "suit, action plaint, or information, before any justice, judge, or court within this state, upon any law or penalty statute relative to the subject of slavery, or the slave trade," in their name.[343]

The society forced local courts to enforce the law. The Providence Abolition Society did much more than advocate for an end to the slavery and the slave trade; they acted as legal watchdogs for vulnerable freed and indentured blacks. In 1789, for example, the society challenged a claim of slave ownership. Robert, a black man, had been arrested for theft and was bailed out by Godfrey Wainwood of Newport. Wainwood claimed the Robert was his slave. Robert was turned over to Wainwood without further inquiry. The society challenged Wainwood's claim in court and when he was unable to produce any legal title or claim to Robert, his claim was dismissed and Robert was freed. Society members also policed those Rhode Island residents who attempted to sell black indentured servants out of the state.[344] In 1791, the society filed a complaint against

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[342] Most of the members of the Society were Quakers and Quakers from Massachusetts and Connecticut were often physically closer to meetings (both religious and abolitionists) in nearby Rhode Island. Bartlett, ed., *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. X. 1784-1792, 382.*

[343] Bartlett, ed., *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England vol. X. 1784-1792*, 382.

[344] 21 August 1789 and 20 November 1789, Providence Abolition Society Minute Meetings, "Yearly Meeting of Friends for New England in Providence" MSS NEYM. Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

Rufus Wheeler of Stonington on behalf of Joseph Johnston of Stonington. Johnston, a black indentured servant, was sold as a slave in Carolina to Hispanola. That same year the society filed a suit against Benjamin Peck for illegally selling "an apprentice boy in South Carolina."[345] Society members also policed their neighbors. In 1789 "a black woman was apprehended in this town and attempted to be carried into the state of New York as a slave, but was protected by the interference of some of the society." By questioning the actions of other white citizens and pursing the enforcement of Rhode Island's gradual emancipation law. These abolitionists served as critical bulwarks for justice in a racially unjust society.

Conclusion

In Rhode Island, the actions of both blacks and abolitionist whites destroyed the institution of slavery. Black resistance—including, flight, military service and bargaining for freedom—undermined the authority of slaveholders. On the other hand, the religious convictions of some Quakers and Congregationalists motivated them to lobby for the legal dismantlement of the institution of slavery. Black challenges to slavery chipped away at mastery; the legislative pursuits of white abolitionists were successful enough to pass a gradual emancipation law. Furthermore, pro-slavery Rhode Islanders were more concerned with protecting the businesses of slavery, rather than defending the right to own slaves in the state. Nevertheless, gradual emancipation allowed slaveholding Rhode Islanders to slowly wean themselves off of slave labor; moreover, the process of emancipation created a population of freed people with little to no resources. In Rhode

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[345] 18 November 1791, Providence Abolition Society Minute Meetings, "Yearly Meeting of Friends for New England in Providence" MSS NEYM. Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

Island emancipation was a an abrupt process for most, but a slow and tedious process for others.

CHAPTER 4

FREEDOM STRUGGLES: BLACK POVERTY, INSTITUTION BUILDING AND RACE RIOTS IN RHODE ISLAND, 1783-1831

Following the American Revolution black Rhode Islanders, most of whom were newly freed people, resisted the many limitations whites imposed on their freedom. They defied poor laws, built independent black institutions and publicly challenged white supremacy. One of the most significant obstacles newly freed Rhode Islanders encountered was the impoverishment that was attached to their freedom. Runaways began their free lives with little more than the clothes on their backs. Black soldiers were paid, but in depreciated continental currency. Those who were privately manumitted or received their freedom as a result of the gradual emancipation law were given no assistance in contrast to their indentured white counterparts who often received land, clothing and seed at the end of their servitude. In response black Rhode Islanders ignored the poor laws and residency restrictions that limited their economic options. They also established independent black institutions; these organizations attempted to provide black Rhode Islanders with the support they needed to survive and flourish as a free community. Although the vast majority of black Rhode Islanders were free by 1790, they had to contend the racist practices and beliefs that Rhode Island inherited its history of from race-based slavery. Many white Rhode Islanders feared a black population whose labor and movements were no longer regulated by the institution of slavery.[346] White hostility toward a growing free black population culminated in two antebellum race riots, which nearly destroyed two black neighborhoods.

Much of the progress that free and freed blacks made following the American Revolution can be attributed to a commitment to institution building. Free black Rhode

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[346] Jacqueline Jones, *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 163.

Islanders, like their northern counterparts, established institutions and businesses that catered to their wants and needs. However, unlike many of their northern neighbors, they lacked the population density necessary for significant self sufficiency. For example, free black artisans, professionals and storekeepers in New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Baltimore could depend on the patronage of their city's sizable free black population. By 1810, those cities boasted several thousand free blacks, while Providence and Newport had just several hundred.[347] However, despite their small numbers, black Rhode Islanders emerging out of slavery made small, but significant gains. African American property values in Providence grew from $10,000 in 1822, to $18,000 in 1830, to $46,000 in 1839. African American heads of household increased by 121% between 1832 and 1844. Finally, African American property ownership increased by 305% between 1829 and 1860.[348] Throughout the North, despite increasing racism, black independence and self help organizations grew in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Nothing But Freedom—Poverty and Marginalization

The emancipation process, in conjunction with racist poor laws, served to impoverish newly freed African Americans. Whether they gained their freedom through flight, military service, self purchase or private manumissions, they left the institution of slavery with few or no resources. Unlike white indentured servants, they received no freedom dues. African Americans received nothing but their freedom for years of uncompensated labor. The process of gradual emancipation made most black people dependent.[349] Poor laws further disadvantaged free people of color. The administrators

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[347] See Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America*, 1800-1850 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

[348] Lydia Pecker, " 'A View of Power': People of Color in Antebellum Providence, Rhode Island" (Honors Thesis, Brown University, April 14, 2003), 35-40.

[349] Historian Jacqueline Jones argues that "though gradually released from their bonds in New England and the Middle Atlantic states, black men, women, and children remained in a legal

of the poor, typically propertied white men who had been part of the master class, were reluctant to economically assist former slaves because they thought it would encourage dependency in what they believed were a inherently dependent people. Consequently, freed people were blamed for their own poverty.[350] Freed people were not only poor, but also increasingly marginalized. Interracial marriages were banned in 1789, and African American men were barred from voting in 1822. Free blacks had to contend with a white citizenry that did not view them as citizens or even legitimate residents of the new nation.[351] Nevertheless, freed people challenged the marginal position offered to them in a nation that acknowledged and protected race-based slavery, and circumscribed black freedom.[352]

Poverty was common in North America following the American Revolution, and freed people joined the ranks of the working poor. The working poor were dependent on each day's labor to subsist, and were usually only one disaster away from requiring private or public aid.[353] Seasonal and cyclical unemployment, illness, insufficient wages, mental illness, a large pool of migrants, low pay for women (often half the pay of

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limbo constrained by the dynamics of labor competition among free workers." She goes on to assert they many of them became part of the "wandering poor," a new class of people who were warned out of towns because of rising welfare cost. Jacqueline Jones, *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor*, 157-163.

[350]See Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University), 1998.

[351] Ibid., 238.

[352] This builds the arguments introduced by John Franklin in which he discusses the recognized inconsistencies of the ideals of the American Revolution and why the institution was ultimately accepted by the new nation. See John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1947).

[353] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, two-thirds of all white immigrants arrived as indentured servants, and when slaves are counted among those migrants to North America, nearly 90% of all migrants were impoverished. Only two out of ten white indentured servants survived their terms and escaped poverty. Billy Smith ed., *Down and Out in Early America* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 7-9.

men), abandonment and high mortality rates all contributed to poverty.[354] The poor, especially people of color, were both heavily victimized and regulated in the new nation.[355]

Following the American Revolution, Rhode Island councilmen continued many of the racist practists of their forefathers. During the colonial period whites who freed their slaves had to post bonds for them. For example, in 1708, when Hope and her two children were freed, her master was required to deposit £150 to ensure that they would not become a burden to the town.[356] Similarly in 1723, when Felix and his family were manumitted, his master had to deposit £500 to ensure that they would not become dependent on the town for support.[357] In early eighteenth century Rhode Island, colonial officials used bonds to prevent poor people of color (those of African and American Indian descent) from becoming public burdens on the public treasury.

Councilmen feared black dependency. Consequently, in granting aid, they followed three guidelines—brevity, frugality and compensation.[358] The poor laws of Rhode Island, as was the case throughout the new states, were largely inherited from

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[354] Ibid., xviii.

[355] Ibid., xviii.

[356] I use Providence Town Council Records from two separate depositories: the Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHSL) and the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society (RIBHS). The papers form the RISH are from the original Town Council books, while the papers from the RIBHS are copies from an unknown source. The minutes from the RIHS include: removal orders, complaints, indentures, fines, receipts and warrants dating from 1751-1830. The minutes from the RIBHS contain residency exams dating from 1755 to 1800. Hope was identified as a mulatto. Thomas Angol, 27 March 1708, Bond "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Series 2 Vol. 3 #0931 Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[357] Felix was identified as a negro. John Brown, 24 June 1723, Bond "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Series 2 Vol. 3 #0947 Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[358] Ruth Wallis Herndon, "'Who Died an Expence to This Town': Poor Relief in Eighteenth-Century Rhode Island," in ed. Billy G. Smith, *Down and Out in Early America* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 132-139.

British common law. The first criteria for issuing relief involved establishing residency. Town councils only provided relief for those who were legal residents. Legal residency required an individual either be born, bound, or own property within town limits. Those seeking aid also had to demonstrate that they had sought other sources of relief, such as from family and churches, before the town council would grant aid. The poor did not receive long-term assistance. They were cared for as cheaply as possible, and they had to contribute to their own upkeep. Public aid administrators also took race into consideration. Whites were more likely to receive poor relief, because potential black dependency was a constant source of concern for white administrators.

Throughout the North, people of color were disproportionately poor because they were routinely discriminated against in residency examinations, which determined whether or not a person was a legal resident of a town or city. In post-colonial Rhode Island, free people of color were concentrated in Newport and Providence. [359] However, the black population in Newport decreased from 1200 prior to the war to 600 by 1782. [360] The Revolutionary War not only caused the physical destruction of the city of Newport, but it also depressed the local economy.[361] Newport was unique among

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[359] The nation's biggest city, New York, had a profound increase in the number of poor residents. Ruth Wallis Herndon, "'Who Died an Expence to This Town'", 150 and David N. Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

[360] Richard C. Yougken, *African Americans in Newport: An Introduction the Heritage of African Americans in Newport, Rhode Island, 1700-1945* (Newport: Newport Historical Society, 1998), 23.

[361] Newport was unique among northern port cities due to its extensive involvement in the slave trade. Local merchants acted as essential middle men. They collected cargoes from local tradesmen and farmers and redirected the goods to buyers in neighboring states, West Africa, the Caribbean and London. Almost every occupation in Newport was tied to slave trading. Seafaring provided employment for sailors, caulkers, sail makers, ropewalk owners and painters. Stevedores and team drivers loaded and unloaded ships. Coopers made barrels for rum. Furthermore, fishermen and farmers were dependent on the trade between Newport and the West Indies. In other words, as Elaine Crane argues, Newport was dependent on the sea and its people were dependent on each other. Elaine Forman Crane, *A Dependent People: Newport Rhode Island in the Revolutionary Era* (New York: Fordham University, 1985), 10-34.

northern port cities due to its extensive involvement in the slave trade. Local merchants collected cargoes from local tradesmen and farmers and redirected the goods to buyers in neighboring states, West Africa, the Caribbean and London. Almost every occupation in Newport was tied to slave trading. Seafaring provided employment for sailors, caulkers, sail makers, ropewalk owners and painters. Stevedores and team drivers loaded and unloaded ships. Coopers made barrels for rum. Furthermore, fishermen and farmers were dependent on the trade between Newport and the West Indies. In other words, as Elaine Crane argues, Newport was dependent on the sea and its people were dependent on each other.[362] British trade restrictions and military occupation during the revolutionary period disrupted trade and ultimately destroyed Newport's economy. Rhode Islanders, black and white, fled the city in search of work.[363]

Freed people ignored and defied poor laws by moving at will. They refused to stay in economically depressed cities; they associated their freedom with a new mobility. Consequently, when Providence replaced Newport as the economic center of the state, black people moved there. Their migrations were met with hostility and removal orders; African Americans were vastly overrepresented in warned out records.[364] One of the primary tools of the town council in controlling the size and behavior of its African American population was ordering them out of town—warning them out. According to historian Ruth Herndon, women and people of color were vastly overrepresented in those warned out of Rhode Island towns. In 1800, half of those warned out of towns (in Rhode Island) were people of color, although they made up just 5% of the total population.

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[362] Ibid., 34.

[363] Crane claims that Newport was destroyed by the Revolutionary War—its population was reduced by half and the physical destruction of the city was devastating—housing shortage despite the decline in population. See Ibid.

[364] December 1819 and June 1820, Overseer of the Poor Report, "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 105 #0034531. Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

Furthermore, between 1750 and 1800, women of color constituted more than 13% of all head of households warned out of Rhode Island towns, although they made up just 5% of all heads household.[365] This evidence suggests the Rhode Island poor laws were not only racist, but sexist. People of color, but especially women, were targets for administrators of the poor, who perceived them as most likely to be economic burdens to towns.

Free people of color who attempted to settle in towns outside those of their birthplace or the location of their previous servitude or enslavement faced serious challenges from white town authorities. This was especially true in Providence. In 1787, the city council ordered Jane Whipple a, "negro" or "mulatto," who was born in Providence and had lived in the city for a total of 20 years, removed to Cumberland where she had served as an indentured servant from the age of five to eighteen.[366] The council allowed her one week to move.[367] In that same year they rejected Huldah Abbey's application for legal residence. She was born in North Providence, but lived in Providence "nearly" all of her twenty years.[368] Even Revolutionary War veterans were restricted from "legally" relocating. The Providence town council denied the request of Bristol Rhodes, a war veteran, who had "illegally" settled in Providence at the end of the

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[365] Herndon, "'Who Died an Expence to This Town'", 147.

[366] Joanne Pope Melish has argued that this type of racial ambiguity, Whipple was identified as a negro or mulatto, in warned out records is evidence of passive resistance on the part of freed people of color. They refused to clarify their racial identities from town clerks; refused to "engage in the racial naming game." Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 239.

[367] Jane Whipple, 1 October 1787, An Order of Removal, "Providence Town Minutes," Folder: Residency Exams Providence Blacks 1787-1799, The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[368] Hilda Abbey, 7 November 1787, Residency Exam "Providence Town Minutes," Folder: Residency Exams Providence Blacks 1787-1799, The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

war.[369] In 1785, concerned General Assembly members stated, "many of the said [revolutionary war veterans] soldiers have become sick and are otherwise unable to maintain themselves." And in their attempt to protect white townspeople from the burden of black residents the assembly declared:

> it shall be the duty of the town council of the town where such Indian, negro or mulatto, who was heretofore a slave, and enlisted into the Continental battalions as aforesaid, and shall be sick, or otherwise unable to support and maintain himself, to direct the overseers of the poor of such town to take care of and provide for such sick or poor Indian, negro or mulatto, in the same way, and with the same economy and frugality, as though such Indian, negro, or mulatto was a pauper of the said town[370]

Even war veterans capable of self-support were confined to the towns of their last enslavement. Despite their service, black veterans, like their civilian counterparts, were treated as second class citizens. Bristol Rhodes' service to the nation did not earn him citizenship rights.

White Rhode Islanders viewed African Americans as potential economic burdens, and consequently expulsions for settling illegally were common for all transients, but especially for transient people of color. In the eighteenth century, "transient" referred not to a traveler or homeless person, but to an individual who was living in a town without legal residency. They were denied the privileges of residency such as poor relief, and were treated as social outcasts.[371] The actions of white citizens and administrators directly contributed to the poverty of newly freed people.

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[369] Bristol Rhodes, 9 September 1794, Residency Exam, "Providence Town Minutes" Folder: Residency Exams Providence Blacks 1787-1799, The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[370] Bartlett, ed., *Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England V. X. 1784,* 85.

[371] Ruth Wallis Herndon, " Women of "No Particular Home": Town Leaders and Female Transients in Rhode Island, 1750-1800," in ed. Larry D. Eldridge, *Women and Freedom in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 270.

When "honorable men," all of whom were white, made complaints concerning illegal settlement, free people of color were often expelled. In 1793 Prince Thurston, "a poor black adjudged by the Hon. Town Council to belong to Newport," was ordered removed and turned over to the Newport Overseer of the poor when he failed to pay his bill at a local boarding house in Providence.[372] Watty Greene, a "mulatto" girl, Cato Gardner a "negro" man, Mary Ceasar, "mulatto woman," and several families of color were all removed from Providence for illegal settlement after complaints from honorable white men.[373]

Removals served as a tool to impoverish and control free people of color. In 1816, Mary Cooper, a "woman of color," was banished to her birthplace (Rehoboth) after her white employer complained of her bad behavior. According to her employer, Mary was a thief and a drunk. She also reportedly neglected his children, threatened to burn his home and kill his family.[374] Mary's employer used her "illegal status" to punish her. As late as 1826, free blacks were being removed from Providence after charges of illegal settlement were made by white citizens. Even legal black residents were harassed. A complaint brought before the Providence Town Council illustrates the extreme poverty of some free people of color, as well as the legal hardships they had to endure because of

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[372] Prince Thurston, 5 June 1793, An Order of Removal, "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 18 #7980, Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[373] Cato Gardner, 6 October 1796, An Order of Removal, "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 26 #11261; Mary Ceasar, 5 September 1796, An Order of Removal, "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 26 #11401 and 2; Watty Greene 17 December 1794, An Order of Removal "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 23 #10142. Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence. Cuff Roberts and family, John Thomas, Lucy Gardner, Newport Kelly and wife, 9 October 1806, Orders for Explusion, "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 60 # 008728; Mary/Martha Ceasar and her daughters Martha (12), Clarissa (8) and Fanny (2), Order for Explusion, "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 60 #008746. Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[374] Moses Staunton, 27 April 1826, A Complaint, "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 88 #0024971; Cuff Robard, 21 September 1795, Indenture for Lease, "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 23 #10059. Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

their poverty. The complaint indicated that four black families were all living in one small house. They were accused of tossing their waste and garbage onto a gangway. The town council was asked to issue a regulation against overcrowding and waste removal. Such regulations would be particularly burdensome to poverty stricken residents.[375]

Free people of color who attempted to immigrate to Rhode Island were summarily rejected. Ebor Hopkins, a "mustee" from Hartford, Connecticut who had lived in Providence "illegally" for two years was denied legal residency. Hopkins, his wife and child were removed to the town of Hartford.[376] Even those with strong connections to the state faced routine denials. In 1788 Titus Guinea, a "negro," initially sold in Newport and later sold to a series of masters in Boston, "illegally" lived in Providence for nearly twenty years when his request for legal residency was denied by the Providence Town Council. They ordered him removed to Ipswich, which was his last place of legal settlement. He was sixty years old.[377] The Council usually gave no reason for their denials, and when they did give a reason they simply stated that the applicant would "likely be chargeable" to the town. Town councilmen were motivated by the entanglements of economics and racism. They wanted to spend as little money as possible supporting the poor, and they did not want free blacks in their communities. Moreover, they felt a responsibility to the larger white community, to protect their racial prerogatives. They did what they what was expected of them. On October 14, 1796, the city of Providence had to cover the cost of coffins for Nero Douglass and another

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[375] Four Families, 9 September 1822, A complaint, "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 111, #0038696. Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[376] Providence Town Minutes (September 17, 1787) Folder: Residency Exams Providence Blacks 1787-1799. The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[377] Titus Guinea, 15 March 1788, Residency Exam "Providence Town Minutes," Folder: Residency Exams Providence Blacks 1787-1799, The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

unnamed "Negro man who died up town." Councilmen wanted to avoid such expenses.[378]

Even legal residency did not protect free people of color from scrutiny and harassment from town councilmen. Patience Ingraham, a "mulatto or Indian" woman, who ran an informal boarding, house was charged with "keeping a common ill governed, and disorderly house and of permitting to reside there, person of Evil Name and Fame, and of dishonest drinking, tipling, whoring and misbehaving themselves to the Damage and Nusance of the Town."[379] Ishmael Brown, John Hix, Jack Grene and Samuel Strange, all black boarders in Ingraham's house, were ordered to appear before the town council to be turned over to Henry Bowen, a white man, for workhouse duties.[380] For free people of color, poverty could lead to involuntary servitude.

Children were also involuntarily indentured to local whites. Such practices were an indication of the precarious economic status of their parents. In 1795 Benoni, a "mulatto" boy, was indentured to George Greene of Warwick for six years and eleven months; he was to be trained as a farmer.[381] Ten years later Benoni's younger brother Thomas was indentured to Stephen Greene of Warwick for ten years and seven months. Their mother, Betty Church, did not sign either indenture contract.[382] It is unclear

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[378] Nero Douglass, 14 October 1796, Order to Pay, "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 26 #11268 Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[379] Patience Ingraham, 23 July 1780 via Nancy Brown alias Nancy Clarkson, Warrant "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 6 #2745 Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[380] Ishmael Brown, John Hex, Jack Greene and Samuel Strange, 7 September 1789, Notice "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol.12 #5260 Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[381]Betty Church, 30 November 1795, Indenture, "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 Vol. 23 #10100 Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[382] Betty Church, 4 Augusts 1805, Indenture, "Providence Town Papers," MSS 214 vol. 23, #10199 Rhode Island Historical Society, (Providence, Rhode Island).

whether or not Church's permission was gained before her children were apprenticed. Like many of their parents, children of color in post-colonial Rhode Island lived within white households.

Many African Americans who legally resided in Providence lived as dependents. Prior to 1810, most free people of color lived in white-headed households and engaged in domestic labor as they had under slavery. After 1810, a substantial number of them remained in white households (table 10).[383] It is particularly notable that the number of blacks in white households increased between 1810 and 1820, after two decades of decline. This evidence suggests that free blacks in Rhode Island remained in precarious economic straits well into the antebellum era. Living within white households may have also been a strategy to avoid contests over legal residency.

[383] Robert J. Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees: Providence's Black Community in the Antebellum Era* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 48.

Table 10: Free Blacks in White-headed households in Rhode Island

Year	Percentage of Blacks (free and enslaved) living in white-headed households
1774	**82%**
1790	**73.2 %**
1800	**62%**
1810	**34.2%**
1829	**39.3%**

Source: This Table is based on a table that lists the percentage of Rhode Island blacks living in black-headed households. Robert Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees: Providence's Black Community in the antebellum era* (Westport: Greeenwood Press), 48

Most freed people of color in Rhode Island were poor. African Americans' ability to seek better economic opportunities was severely limited by poor laws; disproportionate numbers of expulsions, fines and migration restrictions led to impoverishment. They were further impoverished by the practices of racist bureaucrats. Their poverty led to indentures of their children, and an inability to establish their own households. Racism exacerbated the economic vulnerability of free people of color.

Elleanor Eldridge's life exemplifies both the possible successes for free people of color, and the realities of racism in the new nation. Elleanor, also known as Ellen, was born March 26, 1785 in Warwick, Rhode Island. She was one of nine children.[384] Ellen's mother was described as a free mustee. She owed labor to no one. Her father, Robin Eldridge, gained his freedom through military service in the Revolutionary War. Robin Eldridge was not only a war veteran, he was also a landowner. Ellen's brother George was elected "colored" Governor three times.[385] The Eldridge family was economically stable and well respected.

Like many women of color, Ellen engaged in a variety of domestic trades. She worked as a weaver, spinner, washer woman, soap maker, paper maker and white washer.

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[384] Elleanor Eldridge's memoir was written by France Harriet Greene (a white woman whose family had employed Ellen) in order to raise funds to help support Ellen in her old age. This work is the property of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It may be used freely by individuals for research, teaching and personal use as long as this statement of availability is included in the text. Frances Harriet Green, *Memoirs of Elleanor Eldridge, 1784-1845?*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000), 12.

[385] In New England, the mid eighteenth century, blacks began holding "Negro Elections." During these mock elections a black Governor and or King was elected; the elections were followed by parades, games, dinners and dances. Black Governors were typically well respected members of the black community, free and enslaved men were "elected" Governor; these Governors had limited authority within the black community. In the Narragansett there "Negro Elections" were held in every town. the See Joseph P. Reidy, "'Negro Election Day' & Black Community Life, 1750-1860," *Marxist Perspectives*, (Fall 1978), 102-118 and William J. Brown, *The Life of William J. Brown of Providence, Rhode Island, with Personal Recollections of the Incidents in Rhode Island*. Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2006. The memoir does not mention when George held the title of colored governor. Greene, *Elleanor Eldridge*, 33.

She also performed domestic labor for families she boarded with during the winter months. She began working for herself when she was 11 yrs old.[386] Over the decades she amassed a small fortune. By the time Ellen was in her late thirties she reportedly had $600.00 in cash. She purchased a lot in Providence for $100.00. A few years later, she built a two-wing house there for $1700.00. She lived in one half and rented the other for $150.00 a year, and soon after bought an adjacent house to gain access to the gangway (a temporary way of planks—a sort of side walk) for two thousand dollars. Ellen put $500.00 down and mortgaged remaining $1500.00 balance. She agreed to pay 10% interest plus the principle over four years.[387] Ellen was well on her way to becoming a well-propertied woman.

An illness forever changed Ellen's life. In 1831, when she was 46 years old, she caught typhus fever.[388] She left Providence for Warwick to recover with her brother's family. She stayed with them all winter and was rumored dead throughout Providence. Based on those rumors, Ellen's property was put up for sale. When she returned, her mortgage holder apologized and told her he would extend her payment period indefinitely due to her illness. She paid her mortgage holder the interest she owed and returned to Warwick. After she left town, the mortgage holder sold her property for failure to pay. Ellen therefore filed suit in 1837 for non-advertisement of the sale. While she had three men testify that the required public notices had not been posted, the sheriff testified otherwise. She lost the case. Ellen then hired men to investigate the sheriff's claim, and they found no one in town who saw any advertisement for the sale. She brought action against the sheriff, but the case was thrown out.[389] Ellen's decades of hard work were

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386 Greene, *Elleanor Eldridge*, 21-22.

387 Ibid., 68-70.

388 Ibid., 71.

389 Ibid., 74-79.

gone in an instant, and she had no recourse. In fact, she had to depend on the charity of a past white employer to write a memoir on her behalf. Frances Green, a white woman, wrote Ellen's memoir to help raise funds for her support in her old age.

Ellen's story demonstrates that it was indeed possible for even those most discriminated against to achieve economic success—property ownership. However, her experience also reveals how precarious that economic success was, and how easily it could all fall apart. Ellen had little recourse against those wronged who her because she was a person of color and a woman. Ellen's former employer, benefactor and friend clearly stated how and why Ellen had been cheated out of her hard earned property,

> No MAN would have been treated so; and if A WHITE WOMAN had been the subject of such wrongs, the whole town—nay, the whole country, would have been indignant; and the actors would have been held up to the contempt they deserve! Newspaper editors would have copied, and commented on it, till every spirit of honor, of justice and of chivalry, would have been roused[390]

Ellen had done everything right. She worked hard and saved her money. Despite it all Ellen was cheated out of her income-earning property and left destitute because she was a woman of color. She was doubly disadvantaged as a woman, and as a person of color. Had she had either maleness or whiteness to cling to she may have had an opportunity to recover her property. Ultimately, hard work did not determine the economic success of free people of color; regardless of their ingenuity and diligence they were often subject to the disabilities of their race. Ellen, like many blacks in Rhode Island, fought against a racist system. They plead their cases to local town councils and courts. And even though they often lost they continued to fight for their right to move, work and own property. However, African Americans in Rhode Island also acted collectively to combat racism. They did so through institution building.

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[390] Ibid., 91.

Black Institution Building

The mutual aid and benevolent societies established by black Rhode Islanders were not only reactions to social and economic marginality, but also assertions of autonomy and independence. Understanding the formation, challenges, successes and failures of the nation's first free black associations is critical to a full accounting of how free blacks negotiated the constraints of inequality, particularly in a society ambivalent about black freedom. Historians have long noted that mutual aid societies were essential to the social development and economic survival of free black communities.[391] Voluntary organizations addressed the specific needs of newly freed blacks who were particularly vulnerable to economic downturns and personal tragedy, because they often lacked access to mainstream institutions (church, banks, and public welfare) that they could depend on for economic and moral support. Black mutual aid and benevolent societies provided a bevy of services to the African American community; these organizations served as schools and churches as well as informal banks and disability insurers. But perhaps more importantly, these institutions provided newly free blacks with spaces to address social, economic and political grievances. Finally, these organizations were symbols of black permanency and discontent with the status quo; black mutual aid and benevolent societies helped free blacks push for equality. These former slaves created a space for themselves through mutual cooperation. The period from 1780 to 1840, in which free blacks built their own institutions, was arguably the most important for black Americans. It was during this period of time that "free" northern states transformed from states with slaves to states where racial inequality threatened to destroy black freedom. Mutual aid societies were critical to the survival of black

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[391] Leone Bennet Jr. poignantly described the period from 1787 to 1837 "as arguable the most important era in African American history." Taking his cue from Bennet, Harris goes on to argue that voluntary associations were the basis of black institutional life. Robert L. Harris Jr., "Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780-1830," *The Massachusetts Review* 20, no.3 1979: 603-625.

communities in the region. Voluntary associations were of special value to developing societies, because they helped create and institutionalize different roles and relationships. These relationships reinforced new values and behavior patterns outside of the institution of slavery.[392]

Throughout the North, free black communities built schools, churches and mutual aid societies.[393] Community building through institution building was their response to slavery's forced immobility and surveillance.[394] It demonstrated their desire to direct their own futures. Black Rhode Islanders established The Free African Union Society (FAUS) in 1780, the Female African Benevolent Society (FABS) in 1805, the African Benevolent Society (ABS) in 1807 and the African Union Meeting House (AUMH) in 1819.

The Free African Union Society (FAUS) was founded in November of 1780, in the family home of Abraham Casey, in Newport, Rhode Island. It is the earliest known free black association in the United States. Casey, a member of a small but influential black middle class, was a property holder and head of household.[395] The FAUS was established and sustained by men like Casey who not only invested their time in such organizations, but also opened their homes as meeting halls. FAUS leaders were not

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[392] Ibid.

[393] See James Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[394]African American or black Rhode Islanders, who were associated with local mutual aid societies, often referred to themselves as Africans. I use the published correspondence and meeting minutes in my discussion of the Free African Union Society and the African Benevolent Society. Both record groups were presented to Colored Union Congregation Church in 1844 for safekeeping. The church handed them over to the Newport Historical Society in 1963. The Records were transcribed and published in 1976. William Robinson, ed., *The Proceedings of the Free African Union Society and the African Benevolent Society Newport Rhode Island 1780-1824*, (Providence: Urban League of Rhode Island, 1976).

[395] Being a head a household in the nineteenth century indicated that an individual was fairly economically stable and responsible. 1800 United States Census, Newport, Rhode Island, Roll 46, pg. 249, Image 102.

content to organize African Americans in Newport; they also reached out to blacks in Providence. In 1789, in an open letter to "all the Affricans of Providence," the FAUS called for a "particular Society to be known by the name of the Union Society, to meet once in every three months to consider what can be done for our good and the good of all Affricans."

With chapters in Newport and Providence, the FAUS became the political and social voice of Rhode Island's free black community.[396] It is important to note that these voices were all male. Women were not allowed to join the FAUS; consequently, their voices were only reflected through the influence they may have had on their husbands, son and brothers in this and other matters. FAUS members set the example and standard for free black associations throughout the North. Later free black associations followed their emphasis on good moral character, proper burials, disability and dependent support, charity and proud acknowledgement of their African heritage. Although the structure of the organization was similar to contemporary white organizations, the functions and goals of the union were unique.[397] Unlike white organizations, there were no restrictions based on occupation, religion or ethnicity.[398] Furthermore, the common oppression faced by all black Americans bound them together despite class differences. The Union was both exclusive and inclusive. Enslaved men were not restricted from joining. However, all members were male, required to pay dues,

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[396] Levine Street, in Newport, Rhode Island, was home to several middle class free black Rhode Island families in the post colonial period. See Youngken, *African Americans in Newport*.

[397] Union members attended meetings quarterly, while committee members met monthly and the annual meeting took place every August. The committee consisted of a President, Vice President, Judge, Sectary, Treasurer and twelve representatives. At invitation of the Newport organization a second chapter of the FAUS was established in Providence (FAUS—PVD) in 1789. Ceasar Lyndon (by order of the President Anthony Taylor) to Cato Gardner and London Spear, Newport 24 August 1789, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 23.

[398] Harris, "Early Black Benevolent Societies," 611-613.

and demonstrate good moral character.[399] Union members were attempting to build a community that was morally upright, economically stable and politically self-directed.

The FAUS played a critical role in the survival and continuity of the free black community in Rhode Island. In the years before the Revolution, British trade law (stamp and sugar acts) nearly destroyed Newport's economy. Moreover, British occupation during the war led to an economic collapse after the war. As a result, following the Revolution, Newport's African American population decreased by 50%. Newport residents, black and white, fled the city in search of work. [400] Furthermore, newly freed blacks had to contend with discriminatory poor laws and high unemployment rates.[401] The Union provided much needed economic security by supporting the dependents of its members. For example, Susannah Wanton, the widow of Newport Wanton, received payments from the Union when her husband was ill. The Union also covered the cost of his burial; they even paid for the tea, rum and sugar that were served at his funeral. Genny Gardner, also a widower of a Union member, was paid one dollar for her "present relief."[402] Financial support and insurance payments to spouses and children of Union members were common. In other words, membership provided some sense of economic security for black men and their families. The Union also conducted business for out of town members and kept them informed about community issues. For example, Kingston Pease depended on fellow members to conduct his business and "care" for his family,

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[399] The separation of black male and female groups simply reflects gender conventions of the time. James Oliver Horton, "Freedom's Yoke: Gender Conventions Among Antebellum Free Blacks," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 1 (1986): 66.

[400] See Crane, *A Dependent People*.

[401] Youngken, *African Americans in Newport*, 23.

[402] Newport Gardner to Arthur Tikey[sic Taylor], 26 July 1794; Newport Gardner to Unknown, Newport 9 December 1793, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 42-43, 47.

while he made arrangements to relocate to New York.[403] The Union provided much more than economic security, it provided social support.

Membership in a mutual aid society allowed black men to take on conventional male roles as breadwinners, as defined by the larger white society. The Union permitted black men to do what they often were denied as slaves and as second class citizens. It gave them an unprecedented opportunity to support and protect their families. For the first time significant numbers of black men could openly organize to take care of their families. The ability to provide for their families during sickness and death restored a sense of manhood. Historian James Horton goes so far as to argue that, "[F]or black men the ability to support and protect their women became synonymous with manhood and manhood became synonymous with freedom."[404] Ultimately, the Union was a legitimizing organization for black men. The racial ideologies of white supremacy and black inferiority were a part of their everyday lives. Their habit of always referring to each other as "Mr." or "Sir" suggests that they took pride in honorific titles. These titles invoked status and respect, two characteristics often denied to black men by whites in the new nation. Participation in the Union allowed free black men to demonstrate their respectability and validated their manhood.[405] Within the Union they were leaders, men who demanded and commanded respect; they were providing for their families and protecting their communities.

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[403] Lymas Keith on behalf of FAUS to Kingston Pease, Newport 4 March 1791; Ceasar Lyndon To Kingston Pease, Newport 28 July 1792; Kingston Pease to Ceasar Lyndon, New York 7 August 1792, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 37-40.

[404] See Horton, "Freedom's Yoke," 51-76.

[405] The men of the Free African Union Society were demonstrating the same kind of "politics of respectability" as discussed in Evelyn Higginbotham's study of female participation in the black church. See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1993. Horton, "Freedom's Yoke," 65.

African American Rhode Islanders understood that their oppression, as free people, was directly linked to race-based slavery. Throughout the U.S., state laws restricted the institution of slavery to people of African descent. Furthermore, most of these laws rested on the premise that blacks were unfit for freedom, because they were racially inferior. Consequently, Union members were often overly critical of the 'base behaviors' of some free African Americans, especially "idle" free blacks:

> While we are feasting and dancing, many of our complexion are starving under cruel bondage, and it is practice of ours that enables our enemies to declare that we are not fit for freedom- and at the same time this imprudent conduct stops the mouths of our real friends who would ardently plead our cause[406]

They believed that free blacks who ran and patronized dance halls and gaming houses damaged the black freedom cause. FAUS members claimed that their behavior detracted from uplift activities and discouraged support from sympathetic whites.

White surveillance and critique of the black community led to some intra-group conflict among free blacks. It is difficult to accurately place class distinctions among nineteenth century black Americans; however, education levels and home ownership distinguished the middle class blacks from their working class counterparts. The men who dominated the Union were educated and homeowners. [407] For example, FAUS founder Abraham Casey owned a two story home on Levin Street. Levin Street, in Newport, was home to several prosperous black families, most notably the Rice family homestead, which was built in 1815. Isaac Rice, born in 1792 in Narragansett County, ran

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[406] FAUS to Prince Hall, Newport Undated reply to Prince Hall's letter dated 16 September 1789, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 29.

[407] Gardner was the first black musician acknowledged within mainstream community as a professional musician and singing school master. He was instrumental in establishing the FAUS, served as a sexton in Samuel Hopkins church, a teacher in the African Benevolent Society School. He retained in mothers tongue and spoke it fluently his entire life. "Newport Gardner, (1746-1826)" *The Black Perspective in Music* 4, no. 2, Bicentennial Number (Jul., 1976), 202-207. John Ferguson, *Memoir of the Life and Character of Rev. Samuel Hopkins, D.D.: Formerly Pastor of the First Congregational Church in Newport, Rhode Island* (Boston: L.W. Kimball, 1830).

successful catering and landscaping businesses. His home was said to be a stop on the Underground Railroad. There were also several members who were well educated, as a result of private tutoring. John Quamine, Bristol Yamma and Salmar Nubia all studied theology under the Reverends Samuel Hopkins and Ezra Stiles. Ceasar Lyndon, who had been owned by a Rhode Island governor, had acted as a business agent for his master and ran a small but successful private lending practice. His loans were so successful that he was able to purchase his freedom. Prominent Union member Newport Gardner was also a educated homeowner; and like Abraham Casey, he used his home as meeting place. The African Benevolent Society (1807) initially met in Gardner's home.[408] According to local folklore, Gardner was the son of a prosperous African trader who had been sold into slavery by an unscrupulous Rhode Island slave trader his parents had entrusted to educate him.[409] Regardless of how he came to be enslaved, his extraordinary intelligence and musical talents were noted and encouraged by his master. Gardner soon became a sought-after musician and used the money he earned giving lessons to purchase his freedom. Along with Yamma and Quamine, Gardner was careful to retain his native tongue; their desire and determination to retain their native language suggests resistance to full acculturation.[410] These educated, property owning African and African American men dominated the Union leadership.

While many black Rhode Islanders were proud of their African ancestry, as evidenced by the names they gave their associations, they were also conflicted about their heritage. This conflict was primarily religious. Most eighteenth century black Americans,

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[408] Youngken, *African Americans in Newport*, 24-28.

[409] James Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005* (New York: Peguin Press, 2006), 20.

[410] George E. Brooks, "The Providence African Society's Sierra Leone Emigration Scheme, 1794-1795: Prologue to The African Colonization Movement," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7, no. 2 (1974), 185-187.

free and enslaved, were Christians and many were concerned about their "heathen" brothers, as described by whites to African Americans, in Africa. Union members believed they, like the Israelites who were enslaved in Egypt, were a chosen people. They expressed a desire to lift their African ancestors from heathenism and immorality. Free black Rhode Islanders wished to return to the land of their ancestors not only to escape American oppression, but also to transform a "godless" people into practicing Christians. In an open letter to the "Affrican of Providence," Union members wrote:

> the Nations in Affrica, from which we spring, being in heathenish darkness and sunk down in barbarity, and are and have been from many years, many of them, so foolish and wicked as to sell one another into slavery, by which means millions have wither lost their lives or been transported to a Land of slavery [411]

Though judgmental of Africa and Africans, they were convinced that Africans could be saved and that Africa could be a "promised land." They dreamt of a place where blacks could prosper morally, spiritually and economically. Their desire to escape the "evils and disadvantages" of racism in the new nation, as well as their desire to save their "heathen" brethren, led Union members to pursue emigration back to Africa. Returning to Africa was hardly a new idea. In 1735, a regional newspaper reported that a free black Rhode Island couple saved "two or three thousand Pounds, having a Desire to return to their own Country." [412] Free black Rhode Islanders were considering emigration to Africa less than five years after the founding of the U.S.; they did not feel welcomed in the new nation. In their 1789 letter of invitation to the "Affricans" of Providence, the FAUS asked blacks in the city to "wait on the Lord, and [be] ready to do all the good we can, whether we care called to there [Africa], or stay here."[413] However, what made black Rhode

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[411] Anthony Taylor and Saimar Nubia to Cato Gardner and London Spear for all the Africans in Providence, 24 December 1787, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 19.

[412] *The Boston Evening Post*, September 22, 1735.

[413] Anthony Taylor and Saimar Nubia to Cato Gardner and London Spear for all the Africans in Providence, 24 December 1787, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 19.

Islanders unique was that they wanted to return as a community, and they had the ardent support of their white neighbors.

In the post-revolutionary era, whites on both sides of the Atlantic sought to remove their free black populations through African colonization. By 1780, over five thousand blacks, many of whom had served as loyalists during the American Revolution, lived in the slums of London. As a result of economic discrimination, Britain's black population languished.[414] In 1786, nearly one thousand of them were receiving aid from The Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor of London. In response to complaints about this impoverished population, Grandville Stamp, a British abolitionist, formulated plans in 1772 to establish a black colony in Africa. Over ten years later, he successfully petitioned the British Parliament for a self-governing province for free blacks in West Africa. Henry Smeathman, a British explorer and entomologist, was also a proponent of a free black colony. In 1786 he published his *Plan of a Settlement to be made near Sierra Leone, on the Grain Coast of Africa: Intended more particularly for the service and happy establishment of Blacks and People of Colour, to be shipped as freemen under the direction of the Committee for Relieving the Black Poor, and under the Protection of British Government*. Smeathman died before his plan was implemented, but in May 1787, a free black province, Sierra Leone, was settled near the Sierra Leone River. Within two years, settlers either deserted or succumbed to disease. The settlement was re-established in 1791 and renamed "Freetown."[415] The new settlement was financed and governed by English businessmen who opposed slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. The principal directors were prominent abolitionists Granville Sharp, William Wilberforce and Thomas

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[414] Campbell, *Middle Passages*, 23.

[415] Brooks, "The Providence African Society's", 187-190.

Clark. They governed the colony from London by establishing a white local council.[416] The black settlers of Freetown were no longer self-governing; instead, they had become accountable to an all white Board of Directors.[417]

The African colonization movement also drew settlers from Nova Scotia and the United States. Three thousand black loyalists, who were relocated to Nova Scotia from the United States following the American Revolution, were also eager to find better opportunities elsewhere in the world. In 1792, free blacks from Nova Scotia found that the land they were promised in Africa was poorly suited for agriculture or was not there. Furthermore, when war broke out between England and France, the colony was attacked by passing French ships. In an effort to raise money, the Company began charging the settlers 1 shilling per acre for land they had been promised free of charge.[418] As a consequence, many black Nova Scotian settlers were forced to indenture themselves or their children to survive. [419] Despite these circumstances, Freetown was the intended destination of the FAUS members. It is very probable that the Union members did not know the dire conditions of the free black colony.

FAUS members executed a collective, self-directed effort to return to the land of their ancestors. Black Rhode Islanders appropriated African colonization ideas and made the movement their own. They used their connections to influential whites to facilitate a return to Africa, yet they did not wholly rely upon white individuals or organizations.

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[416] C. Magbaily Fyle, *The History of Sierra Leone* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1981), 34.

[417] See A. P. Kup, *Sierra Leone: A Concise History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975).

[418] Fyle, *The History of Sierra Leone* , 36.

[419] See W. Bryan Rommel-Ruiz, "Colonizing the Black Atlantic: The African Colonization Movements in Postwar Rhode Island and Nova Scotia," *Slavery and Abolition* 27, no. 3 (December 2006): 349-365.

However, their insistence on directing their own future may have led to their ultimate failure.

Free blacks, in the United States, were divided over African colonization.[420] In the eighteenth century, emigration was largely condemned by black communities in Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut, while blacks in South Carolina and Maryland supported relocation to Africa. Black Rhode Islanders, like blacks in South Carolina and Maryland, lived in states where the "business of slavery" was central to the economy. However, unlike their southern neighbors, Rhode Island state law did not dictate that emancipated blacks had to leave the state. Nevertheless, free black Rhode Islanders had more in common with free blacks in the South, in general, because they too lived in a society that was directly and intimately tied to the institution of slavery. Between 1787 and 1808, Rhode Island merchants transported nearly forty-six thousand African slaves to the Caribbean and the southern U.S., despite a 1787 law that made it illegal for Rhode Island citizens to participate in the slave trade.[421]

Meanwhile, some opponents of African emigration felt it was wrong to abandon their enslaved brothers and sisters, while others believed that emigration to Canada or Haiti made more sense. Furthermore, some free blacks refused to yield to white racism. They insisted on their rights as American citizens. On the other hand, supporters of black colonization believed that because U.S. slavery was race-based, free blacks would never be truly free. They were convinced that their freedom would always be in jeopardy and severely limited.[422]

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[420] See Henry Noble Sherwood, "The Formation of the American Colonization Society," *Journal of Negro History* 2, no. 3 (1917): 209-228.

[421] David Eltis, et al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade A Database on CD-ROM [CD-ROM]]* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).Brooks, "The Providence African Society's," 184.

[422] Louis R. Mehlinger, "The Attitude of the Free Negro Toward African Colonization," *The Journal of Negro History* 1:3 1916, 276-301.

Decades before the black emigration debates of the nineteenth century, black Rhode Islanders attempted a self-directed migration to Africa. They made African colonization, first planned by whites and intended for England's free black population, their own cause.[423] William Thornton, a white abolitionist, brought the news of the free African colony—Sierra Leone—to black Rhode Islanders in 1786. Thornton, most known for designing the U.S. capitol, was an ardent supporter of African colonization. He was born in a Quaker community at Tortola in the British Virgin Islands, but was raised by his mother's family in England. Although he inherited a generous income, including half interest in a sugar plantation, he was trained as a physician and apothecary. Thornton returned to Tortola at the age of twenty seven and came face to face with the source of his wealth—slavery. He was troubled and decided to abandon his inheritance; he emigrated to the U.S. and joined the abolition movement. Thornton spent the rest of his life trying to atone for the sins of his family's connection to slavery.[424] Throughout New England, in the winter of 1786, Thornton "spoke to crowds of blacks, and within a few weeks of his arrival in New England claimed that two thousand freedmen were ready to follow him to West Africa." [425] In Rhode Island, Thornton found what he was looking for—free blacks eager to escape oppression and whites willing to assist them. White promoters of colonization hoped a free colony would help destroy the slave trade, which in turn would lead to abolition.

Thornton's plan was embraced by local white abolitionists and anti-abolitionist who did not want free blacks in the state. Samuel Hopkins and Ezra Stiles, both of whom had relationships with FAUS members, were long-time supporters of colonization. In

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[423] Louis R. Mehlinger, "The Attitude of the Free Negro Toward African Colonization," *The Journal of Negro History* 1:3 1916, 276-301.

[424] See C. Ford Peatross ed., *Capital Drawings: Architectural Designs for Washington, D.C., from the Library of Congress,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

[425] Brooks, "The Providence African Society's," 187.

1774, they had raised funds to educate Bristol Yamma and John Quamine, members of Hopkins' congregation, to train them as ministers for African congregations. They proposed a plan to send them to Africa as missionaries and settlement negotiators.[426] The Revolutionary War and Quamine's subsequent death temporarily disrupted their plans.[427]

The African colonization movement had more support than ever following the Revolutionary War. Many whites in the United States supported and championed black emigration, because they could not conceive or envision a place for free blacks in the new nation. Free blacks posed an ideological problem for citizens of a nation that acknowledged and protected both race-based slavery and white supremacy. If it was acceptable to enslave people of African descent because they were inferior and incapable of living as free persons, free blacks were a serious problem. Race-based slavery rested on the rationale that blacks were inherently unfit for freedom. The presence of free blacks in the new nation was an anomaly. African colonization was the answer. Furthermore, for many whites, a free society meant a society free of blacks. Consequently, most whites strongly supported African colonization. Throughout the North, gradual emancipation laws had allowed whites to claim theirs as a free society while still having access to bound black labor. By the antebellum era, the northern states had almost completely eradicated their dependence on slave labor; instead, they relied on the cheap labor of newly freed people who were severely economically and politically marginalized. White New Englanders wanted to remove all traces of blacks, who were living reminders of slavery, in the states in order to claim a history as a land of freedom—white freedom. Consequently, northern whites emphasized slavery as a southern problem and used the

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[426] Rommel-Ruiz, "Colonizing the Black Atlantic," 349-365.

[427] Quamine died in 1779 serving on a ship; he was fighting for prize money to buy his wife's freedom. Brooks, "The Providence African Society's," 186.

popular press to characterize blacks as a threat to civility and order. They also characterized free blacks as lazy and immorally, which allowed whites to blame blacks for their own property rather than acknowledged the racism that contributed to black poverty. Finally, many northern whites supported African colonization.[428] It was in this environment that FAUS members embraced African colonization.

Some black Rhode Islanders considered emigration to Africa their only alternative. In 1787, black Rhode Islanders advocated for and planned a return to Africa.[429] It was with conviction and sadness that the members of the FAUS (Providence) boldly articulated why African colonization was their only plausible option.[430]

> We, the members of the Union Society in Newport, takeing into consideration the calamitous state into which we are brought by the righteous hand of God, being strangers and outcasts in a strange land, attended with many disadvantages and evils, with respect to living, which are like to continue on us and on our children, while we and they live in this country…[431]

The words of the Union members invoked Exodus 23:9; "Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." They likened themselves to the enslave Israelites in Egypt. Furthermore, FAUS member and officer Anthony Taylor expressed their urgency to emigrate in a letter to William Thornton; "Our earnest desire of returning to Africa and settling there has induced us further to trouble you with these lines, in order to convey to your mind a more

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[428] Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 192-198.

[429] Brooks, "The Providence African Society's Sierra Leone Emigration Scheme" 183.

[430] A second chapter of FAUS was established in Providence in 1789 at the invitation and encouragement of the founding union in Newport. Ceasar Lyndon (by order of the President Anthony Taylor) to Cato Gardner and London Spear, 24 August 1789. Robinson, *The Proceedings*, 23.

[431] Anthony Taylor and Saimar Nubia to Cato Gardner and London Spear for all the Africans in Providence, 24 December 1787, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 19.

particular and full idea of our proposal."[432] He wanted to know how to procure rights to land and asked for assistance in raising funds to purchase settlement land in Africa.

By the end of the eighteenth century, FAUS members had the verbal support of many whites in their attempts to resettle in Africa. One Union member wrote, "every white person in Town seems to be forward in promoting the matter."[433] William Thornton, an intermediary between FAUS and the larger white community, relayed news and sought funds for the Rhode Island colonization effort. In a letter to FAUS members he wrote, "I imagine you have been acquainted with my having conveyed your sentiment to the Committee on Affrican Affairs in London, whose answer on your account I now wait, and which I mean immediately to receipt to transmit."[434] Union members were not sure whether or not they could trust William Thornton. They were also adamantly opposed to him acting in the stead of a black man in scouting possible settlements in Africa. Long-time FAUS member Samuel Steven stated, "we do not approve of Mr. Thornton's going to settle a place for us; we think it would be better if we could charter a Vessel, and send some of our own Blacks."[435] The Union circulated letters, to several other black organizations, promoting the cause of African colonization throughout the newly formed states. The African Company of Boston was in full agreement.

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[432] Anthony Taylor to Unknown, 24 December 1787, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 16. William Thornton was the son of a slaveholder who in his twenties decided to dedicate his life to abolition and the African Colonization movement. "William Thornton and Negro Colonization," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 30, no. 1 (April 14, 1921).

[433] Free African Union Society (Providence) to Free African Union Society (Newport), 25 February 1794, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 45-46.

[434] William Thornton to the Elders and Members of the Union Society, 6 March 1787, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 17.

[435] Samuel Stevens to Anthony Tiler (sic Taylor) 1 June 1787, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 17-18.

Black communities that supported African colonization often lacked the resources to execute a return to Africa. African Americans in Massachusetts and Rhode Island sought the help from their local governments to settle in Africa. In 1774, blacks in Massachusetts requested that the colonial legislature emancipate them, with the hope that they would be able to leave the colony for someplace in Africa.[436] Thirteen years later, in 1787, they petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for funds, because they simply did not have the means to send a scout.[437] In Rhode Island, the Providence chapter, to the chagrin of the founding Newport chapter, took the lead in the colonization effort. In January 1794, FAUS (Providence) sent a petition to the Rhode Island General Assembly for assistance in their endeavor to leave the state and settle in Sierra Leone.[438] The Newport chapter sent a sharp retort; they reminded the Providence chapter that they did not speak for the entire Union. They also asserted that such an action should have been approved and carried out by both chapters, especially considering the Newport chapter was responsible for the formation of the Providence chapter. The Newport chapter appointed one of their most prominent members, Newport Gardner, to accompany James Mackenzie, a Providence FAUS officer, to represent the Union in Sierra Leone.[439] Eleven months later, in November of 1794, the Union sent Mackenzie aboard the *Charlotte* to obtain and secure information about settlement in the Sierra Leone

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[436] Rommel-Ruiz, "Colonizing the Black Atlantic," 349.

[437] Samuel Stevens to Anthony Tiler (sic Taylor), Boston, 1 June 1787 and Anthony Taylor to Samuel Stevens and the African Company at Boston, 4 November 1787, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 17-19.

[438] Free African Union Society (Providence) to Free Africa Union Society (Newport), Providence, 15 January 1794, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 43.

[439] Free African Union Society (Newport) to Free African Union Society (Providence), 26 February 1794, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 46-47.

Company.[440] Newport Gardner was not aboard the ship—the records do not allow for speculation of why he was not aboard the ship.

Mackenzie arrived safely in Africa and submitted a letter to the Sierra Leone Council on behalf of the Free African Union Society of Rhode Island. The council members decided they would accept up to twelve families. Each family would receive ten acres and a communal town lot. There were, however, some conditions. Potential colonists had to obtain recommendations attesting to their moral character, agree to follow the laws of the colony, provide their own transport, and clear a third of their granted land by the end of their second year. The Council of the Sierra Leone Company wrote directly to Samuel Hopkins, not to the Union president and officers, asking him to vouch for the potential colonists.[441] The leading officials in the Sierra Leone Company were white men, who depended on other white men to vouch for the characters of potential black settlers. Sierra Leone, clearly, was not the black utopia that FAUS members had hoped for. Black Rhode Islanders were not appealing to a self governed free black colony, but a colony that was financed and governed by white men in London.

Samuel Hopkins thwarted the Union's emigration effort. He did not offer the requested letters of character for the black families wishing to emigrate.[442] It is unclear why Hopkins did not provide letters. Maybe he legitimately believed that those who sought them were not of good character. Yet this seems highly unlikely, considering he worked closely with several members of the Union. Maybe he resented the fact that the

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[440] Owned by Nicholas Brown Jr., George Benson and Thomas P. Ives the *Charlotte* carried American rum, tobacco, lumber and foodstuffs to Sierra Leone. Ship captain Martin Benson held Mackenzie in contempt, he viewed him as a liability to the crew. Mackenzie had the support of Moses Brown and George Benson, so he was allowed passage and appointed second mate. See Brooks, "The Providence African Society's," 192-194. Free African Union Society (Newport) to Free African Union Society (Providence) [A direct response to a letter sent on 15 January 1794], Date Unknown, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 44.

[441] Brooks, "The Providence African Society's," 196-197.

[442] Ibid., 183.

Union did not seek his permission or advice before sending Mackenzie to enquire about settlement. This is more likely, considering white abolitionists often butted heads with black leaders who attempted to direct their own destinies. White abolitionists often held paternal attitudes towards blacks and resented black Americans who took charge of their own affairs. [443] Despite the desire of some black Rhode Islanders to emigrate to Africa, the power to do so was often out of their hands. They needed white patronage. Ultimately, they needed the approval and support of Samuel Hopkins; and when he denied it, their plans were ruined.

The failure of the colonization project is not as important, for this analysis, as the desire of free blacks to flee Rhode Island. White authorities in Rhode Island created a landscape in which freed people were extremely marginalized because the state's economy was invested in race-based slavery. Black aspirations to leave the "free" state of Rhode Island for an unknown land speaks volumes about the circumstances and difficulties of everyday life for free African Americans in Rhode Island. The fact that they organized and planned an escape from racial oppression in 1794 is noteworthy. While white Americans were exercising their new-found freedoms and liberties; free black Americans were searching for a glimmer of freedom and liberty elsewhere in the world.

The free black community was committed to institution building; consequently, when The Free African Union Society dissolved in 1797 the remaining members reorganized in 1802, as the African Humane Society (in Newport). By 1805, the society had only thirty-six members, which was a far cry from the one hundred and eight members FAUS boasted in 1785. Seventy two members had died since the Union's founding.[444] Beaten but not defeated, free black Rhode Islanders, in Newport, again

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[443] Ibid.

[444] Yougken, *African Americans in Newport*, 23.

organized a new mutual aid society—the African Benevolent Society, 1807. The desire of free black community to habitually reconstitute their institutions was truly remarkable. Despite setbacks and disappointments they refused to give up on institution building; they were determined to maintain organizations and structures that catered to needs of free blacks. They were determined to create spaces where they could gather and pursue uplift activities.

In 1807, during a general meeting of blacks in Newport, someone proposed establishing a school for blacks. All in attendance supported the proposal.[445] The African Benevolent Society (ABS) sought to raise black Rhode Islanders "out of that state of ignorance and depression, into which the injustice, Pride and avarice of others have attempted to sink your color."[446] They declared, "Our Object shall be the establishment and continuance of a free school for any person of colour of this Town."[447] African Americans in Newport had taken the first step towards the black middle class political ideology of uplift. Uplift ideology, the belief that blacks could obtain social and political equality through good behavior and education, dominated African American middle class ideology throughout the nineteenth century. It was one contention that nearly all African American leaders agreed on. They believed that individual self improvement would help undermine racism. In other words, if blacks could educate their children, form mutual aid societies and live frugally, their position in society would improve.[448]

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[445] Proceedings of a General Meeting of Africans 1807. Robinson, *The Proceedings*, 153.

[446] Caleb J. Tenney, Clerk of Directors, [Annual directors' report to the society] ,31 December 1809, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 172.

[447] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 1808, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 153.

[448] Frederick Cooper, "Elevating the Race: The Social Thought of Black Leaders, 1827-50," in *African American Activism Before the Civil War*, ed. Patrick Rael (New York: Routledge,

The ABS had neither sex nor race restrictions. Initially, members had to pay a membership fee of fifty cents. However, in 1810 membership was extended to "all that are willing to promote the means of education for the African Race."[449] There had been other schools for free people of color, but the ABS was the first black institution to focus exclusively on educating black Rhode Islanders. But perhaps more importantly, they offered a free education. Seventy-eight students attended the ABS school during it's first year of operation.[450] By 1810, just three years after its founding, the society had nearly 50 members.[451] The lengths that the ABS was willing to go to establish their own school suggests that existing schools were not meeting community needs.[452] The ABS school provided much needed access to education for blacks in Newport prior to the opening of public schools; Rhode Island did not establish common school system until 1830. Rhode Island law did not bar African American children from attending public schools; however, schools in Providence, Newport and Bristol were segregated through local ordinances. These cities held the vast majority of the state's black population.[453] Rural

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2008), 58-60. Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002), 119-120.

[449] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 17 January 1810, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 169-171.

[450] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 1809, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 159-162.

[451] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 16 March 1810, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 157.

[452] Sarah Osborn established a mixed school in the 1750s. Local churches also organized schools or classes for Africans: Reverend Thomas Patten (1754), Maramduke Brown (1763), and Reverend George Bissett (1770s). Mrs. Mary Brett also operated a school for Africans in the 1760s and 1770s. Richard C. Yougken, *African Americans in Newport,* 18-19. Thomas B. Stockwell, *A History of Public Education in Rhode Island* (Providence: Providence Press Company, 1876), 10.

[453] Rhode Island schools were legally desegregated in 1866. Lawrence Grossman. "George T. Downing and Desegregation of Rhode Island Public Schools," *Rhode Island History* 36, no. 4 (November 1977): 100-107.

school districts had integrated schools, because the small number of African American children in these areas did not warrant separate facilities. In many rural towns African American students accounted for less than one or two percent of the total school aged population.[454]

Three men dominated ABS leadership: Arthur Flagg Jr., Newport Gardner, and Reverend Dr. William Patten. Flagg Jr. served, as society president from 1807 to 1810 and secretary from 1813 to 1820.[455] His father, born in 1739 and freed in 1801, was an active Union member. He served as a judge and treasurer; he worked as a rope maker and owned property in Newport. Flagg Jr. grew up in the midst of black Newport's social and political elite. Union meetings were often held in his childhood home. Gardner, arguably the most socially and politically active black American in post revolutionary Rhode Island, acted as ABS president from 1811 to 1820. Patten, a local white abolitionist and minister of the Second Congregational Church of Newport, served as society treasurer from 1810-1824.[456] These men were experienced in institution building. They all served as directors throughout the society's existence, and as instructors when necessary. Under their leadership, the society doggedly pursued its goals.

African American Rhode Islanders, having learned a valuable lesson from the failed colonization effort, were now faced with the unavoidable reality of their need for

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[454] In the 1850s George T. Downing along with established local leaders led an unsuccessful campaign to integrate Rhode Island schools. Downing was the son of the successful New York restaurateur; he owned a luxury hotel in Newport and ran a catering business in Providence. Although the campaign was not successful it laid the ground work for future desegregation legislation. Rhode Island schools were legally integrated in 1866. Robert J. Cottrol, *The Afro Yankees*, 90-101.

[455] Yougken, *African Americans in Newport*, 49.

[456] William Patten, "On the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade and the Importance of Correcting It" (sermon delivered in the Second Congregational Church, Newport, Rhode-Island, 12 August 1792), University of Iowa, Iowa City Iowa, microfilm.

white patronage.[457] While there were no racial restrictions concerning membership or officers in the ABS, there were however, racial concessions. Four of the director positions were set aside for white men and two white directors needed to be present to transact any business. Society directors wielded considerable power and influence in the institution. They were charged with money management, planning the academic schedule as well as finding and retaining instructors. The society school was open during the day and in the evening. However, financial difficulties forced them to offer evening-only classes only a year after the school opened. The directors thought an evening school was more practical, because it allowed for adult attendance. Although whites had a place within the society, black Rhode Islanders made sure to maintain their autonomy; all decisions required the approval of the "coloured" majority.[458]

Men in the society were as concerned with black autonomy as they were with male hegemony. Women of color were not restricted from joining the society, but they did not occupy positions of power within the school and a quorum of the male membership was required to conduct any society business. Women favored membership in the African Female Benevolent Society (AFBS), where they could freely direct their own destiny.

The AFBS was established in 1805, a couple of years before the ABS. AFBS members had reportedly "habitually taught and partially clothed twenty-five or thirty children."[459] In other words, the women had a school before the formation and establishment of the ABS School. Records mention, but do not indicate, exactly what

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[457] The main lesson learned from the FAUS African colonization effort was not to totally excluding whites from black organizations, because free blacks often needed white patronage to navigate the racist society that they lived in.

[458] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 13 January 1809, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 159-162.

[459] Thomas B. Stockwell, *A History of Public Education in Rhode Island 1636 to 1876* (Providence: Providence Press Company, 1876), 30.

happened to the AFBS school. The evidence suggests that the AFBS school merged with the society school.[460] Although the women no longer ran a school the AFBS remained an autonomous organization. Nevertheless, male leaders of the ABS took every opportunity to instruct the women. They strongly encouraged them to:

> lay no bar in the way as to hinder any person from becoming a member of the society. Remember that God has no respcter of persons, and whosoever will let him come. The Society would also recommend to you that in all your meetings, first remember to ask direction from Heaven of that God from whence all blessings flow.[461]

The men believed that these women were in need of men's instruction. Regardless of any tension between the two groups, they appeared to be dedicated to and respectful of one another; correspondence between the male and female society always included a blessing. The female society also regularly contributed the ABS school with funds from their treasury. In 1809, they allotted ten dollars for the men's society to support the school.[462] The black women of Newport were as concerned about access to education as their male counterparts. These women were willing to do whatever was necessary and within their means to support the ABS school. It appears that the AFBS was a little more stable than the ABS. In 1810, they reported having forty members with meetings "regularly attended" and payments that were "tolerable punctual."[463] Unlike the ABS, the AFBS did not seem to have problems collecting dues. The evidence suggests that the large ABS encompassed men from the elite to the working class. The AFBS, on the other hand, was most likely dominated by the upper classes. At a time when the majority of black families

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[460] Ibid.

[461] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 20 January 1809, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 162.

[462] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 25 October 1809, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 165-166.

[463] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 20 January 1810, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 172-173.

were living day to day, those who could afford membership dues for associations and organizations were most likely from the middle class. The women of the AFBS were women of means, and as a result they were not as susceptible to economic downturns.

On the other hand, staffing and financial problems plagued the ABS School. The directors could not maintain a regular schedule or retain a permanent teaching staff. The school was often only open for months at a time; and instructors changed frequently. As a result of delinquent membership payments, the school was closed during the summer and winter of 1813.[464] In 1819, the school was so late in opening that the society thought it was better to use their money to help support children already enrolled in other private schools or receiving tutoring; the ABS provided funds for thirty two children of "color" to attend other schools.[465]

Finding and keeping instructors was particularly difficult for ABS directors. The society preferred to hire black female instructors, because most of the students were young and/or female. However, because black female instructors were in short supply, the directors were often forced to compromise. They hired black men and white women, but not white men.[466] Black society members were concerned about white male hegemony; they did not want a white man in a position of authority within the school. Furthermore, most white teachers would not accept employment at a "colored" school. In 1809, the mere rumor of hiring a white male instructor created a stir and led to the formation of a committee of society members. The committee assessed the opinions of society members and found that they indeed disapproved of hiring a white male

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[464] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 21 February 1814 Newport and 2 March 1814, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 182.

[465] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 7 January 1819, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 186.

[466] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 2 January 1811, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 174-175.

instructor. Despite the assertions from the directors that a white instructor might improve enrollment, a "colored" male instructor was hired.[467]

The society, continually plagued with money shortages and low meeting attendance, commissioned a special committee to suggest ways to improve their conditions.[468] In 1816, in order to make the meetings more congenial and orderly, the leadership of the society decided to issue fines to address inappropriate conduct. Interrupting someone while they were speaking cost the offender twenty five cents; failure to rise and address the moderator when wishing to speak resulted in a one shilling, six pence fine. These fines probably punished those least able to afford them. Members also had the option of paying their dues in weekly installments instead of annually.[469] However, despite money troubles, the society managed to educate hundreds of free people of color during their seventeen years (1807 – 1824) of existence. Their story in not one of steady progress or decline, but instead a story of perseverance in the face of adversity.

The society school fared best in its last years. In addition to receiving money from the Society of Friends, the school was able to manage below budget for two consecutive years. In 1821, they had a full (fall through spring) school year and money left over in the treasury.[470] As a result, the school opened early in 1822. That same year, they collected $ 71.29 in membership dues and the school operated at a cost of $ 52.50, which left a

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[467] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 1809, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 159-162. Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 29 January 1812, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 178.

[468] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 3 January 1816, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 183-184.

[469] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 6 March 1816, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 188.

[470] Ibid.

surplus of nearly twenty dollars. [471] The African Benevolent Society, like many nineteenth century black mutual aid societies, dissolved as a result of financial strain. However, during the last years of the ABS in Newport, blacks in Providence were busy constructing another black institution. The African Union Meeting House (AUMH) was not only the first black church in Providence, but also a school.[472]

In March of 1819, the blacks of Providence gathered at the First Baptist Church to discuss arrangements for establishing a "regular" school.[473] A committee was formed which sent the following message to the pastors of churches with black congregants:

> The active zeal evinced by many of the people of colour, in the town of Providence, to provide a place for the education of their children, and the public worship of GOD, is, in our opinion exceedingly laudable, and worthy of the liberal encouragement of the all good people.[474]

It took the blacks of Providence three years to construct their school. They raised eight hundred dollars among themselves and six hundred dollars through public subscriptions and donations. Moses Brown, a prominent local abolitionist, donated the land, which was valued at $200.00 for the building site. However, local blacks constructed the building.[475] They laid the foundation in April of 1819; by December they had raised the roof and in May of 1820 they finished the framing. Finally, in June of 1821 the clapboard on the exterior was finished and on Friday August 31, 1821 the African Union Meeting School House was furnished with pews, which had been sold to members to offset the cost. The African Americans of Providence built and furnished the building,

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[471] Meeting Minutes of the African Benevolent Society 3 January 1822, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 191.

[472] Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees*, 60.

[473] Moses Brown, *A Short History of the African Union Meeting and School House, Erected in Providence (R.I.) In the Years 1819, '20, '21: With Rule for its Future Government* (Providence: Brown and Danforth, 1821), 3.

[474] Ibid , 4.

[475] Ibid , 13.

but the deed remained in the hands of the Brown family.[476] In this and other settings, black autonomy was tenuous.

Despite the fact that black Rhode Islanders did not legally own the church and meeting house, they appropriated the space. The building dedication included a parade and a performance by an African choir. The Prince Hall Freemasons likely participated in the dedication, by performing a cornerstone ceremony. A branch of Prince Hall masons had been established in Rhode Island in 1790s, and one of the fraternity's primary functions in the black community was cornerstone-laying at newly built churches, colleges and schools.[477] Black Rhode Islanders displayed their pride in their African heritage through their celebration and dedication of the meeting house. William J. Brown, who was born and raised in Providence and attended the AUMH school, reminisced about the dedication in his autobiography:

> The young colored men formed a military company (called the African Greys) to escort the African societies to their new house of worship. The African societies wore their regalias. The president of the societies, who was their commander, was dressed to represent an African chief, having on a red pointed cap, and carried an elephant's tusk in each hand; each end was tipped with gilt. The other officers carrying emblems, decked with lemons and oranges, representing the fruits of Africa, and other emblems. The military company wore black belts and carried muskets, and officers with their side arms.[478]

This display of military power must have been disconcerting to their pacifist Quaker sponsors who were escorted by the company to the meeting-house. Moses Brown was successful in convincing the African Greys to leave their firearms outside of the church. The African Greys, led by Commander George Barrett who fought in the War of 1812,

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[476] Pecker, " 'A view of Power'," 30.

[477] William A. Muraskin, *Middle-class Blacks in a White Society: Prince Hall Freemasonry in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) 34, 174.

[478] William J. Brown, *The Life of William J. Brown of Providence, Rhode Island, with Personal Recollections of the Incidents in Rhode Island*, (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2006), 47.

comprised the black military company of Providence. The evidence suggests that the African Grey Company was ceremonial and not recognized by the state.[479] However, the presence and pageantry of the company suggest that black Rhode Islanders were not attempting to conform or fit into white mainstream society. Instead, they publicly displayed their difference in the streets of Providence. The men in the company dressed as thought their African ancestors dressed and celebrated the foods of the African continent. They were creating culture—African American culture.[480] The ceremony that accompanied institution building was instrumental in cultivating black culture.

The AUMH school was not free; students were charged a $1.50 per quarter. However, despite the cost, many black families (125 students) found the resources to send their children to the school in the fall of 1821.[481] But, like their counterparts in Newport, blacks in Providence had difficulty keeping teachers. William Brown, a former student, wrote:

> After keeping the school for one year his (Mr. Ormsbee) labors came to a close, and for a year and a half the school was suspended, not being able to procure a teacher. 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.[482]

After decades of inconsistent schooling, black Rhode Islanders raised a permanent structure dedicated to educating the black community.

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[479] An official state sanctioned black company was not raised until the Dorr Rebellion. Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees*, 76.

[480] Free blacks in New Yorkers were also creating African American culture. They created a distinctive style of language, dress, hairstyle, and even body movement (walks). Throughout the North, free blacks were pursuing their cultural independence. Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: the end of slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 185-200.

[481] Brown, *The Life of William J. Brown*, 26.

[482] Ibid., 27.

Between 1780 and 1821, black Rhode Islanders created a free community through institution building. January 1826, twenty nine-years after the dissolution of the Free African Union Society, two years after the disbandment of the African Benevolent Society, and five years after the dedication of the African Union Meeting and School House, thirty-two black Rhode Islanders finally managed to find their way to Africa. They were members of Paul Cufee's legendary voyage. Seventy year old Salmar Nubia and eighty year old Newport Gardner were among the settlers. Their dream of returning to Africa was realized late in life and briefly. In 1826, Nubia and Gardner died free men on the continent on which they had been born.[483] Their tenacity was remarkable. These two black nationalists had helped establish free black communities on two continents.

Many black Rhode Islanders, especially those who advocated emigration to Africa, held black nationalistic beliefs. African colonization stories were often told through the lens of white abolitionists. Based on those stories, historians have argued that colonization was imposed on free blacks. Furthermore, many historians argue that Black Nationalism has its roots in the early nineteenth century. However, studying Rhode Islanders' self-directed migration attempt reveals a very different story—a tale of early black nationalism. Although members of FAUS, the ABS, the FABS and the AUMH would not have coined themselves "black nationalists," their missions and ideologies had black nationalistic themes.

Black Rhode Islanders were articulating their own brand of black nationalism in the late eighteenth century. Historian Patrick Rael has identified three basic elements of black nationalism; group consciousness built on racial identity and pride, a desire to develop social and political institution autonomous from those of whites, and the

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[483] Brooks, "The Providence African Society's," 202.

expression of a distinct black cultural heritage.[484] All of these traits were evident among black Rhode Islanders. Between 1780 and 1820, black Rhode Islanders created four institutions to specifically address the economic, political, educational and spiritual needs of the black community. Moreover, they used the term African to label their organizations. They could have called themselves black, negro or colored, but instead they chose to refer to themselves as African. Furthermore, they specifically referred to themselves as "strangers and outcasts in strange land." Despite the fact that most of them had been born in North America, they felt like outsiders in their own country, and country many of them had fought for.[485] When they dedicated their churches, meeting and school houses, they proudly displayed their cultural heritage through the streets. They dressed as "African" chiefs and celebrated the "fruits" of the African continent. FAUS members clearly felt an affinity to their African "brethren" and believed the condition of black Americans was dire enough to warrant emigration. In 1789, in a letter to "all the Affricans in Providence," the society warned black Rhode Islanders that same problems they faced would also limit their children.

> We the members of the Union Society in Newport, takeing into consideration the calamitous state into which we are brought by the righteous hand of God, being strangers and outcasts in a strange land, attended with many disadvantages and evils, with respect to living, which are like to continue on us and our children while we and they live in this country.

Furthermore, African American leaders understood that blacks throughout the Americas faced serious problems, "And they yet more wretched state of may hundred of thousands of our brethren who are in abject slavery in the West Indies and the American states,

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[484] Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 210.

[485] Anthony Taylor and Saimar Nubia to Cato Gardner and London Spear for all the Africans in Providence, 24 December 1787, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 19.

many of who are treated in the most inhumane cruel manner and are sunk down in ignorance, stupidity and vice."

The state of "Affricans" in the New World in general led them to advocate emigration:

> And God has been pleased of late to raise up many to compassionate and befriend the Affricans, not only in promoting their freedom and using means for their instruction, but by proposing and endeavoring to effect their return to their own country and the settlement there, where they may be more happy than they can be here, and promote the best good of our brethren in that country.[486]

They felt alienated in their own country. The sense of being an outsider, with little hope of ever being accepted or treated equally by white society, encouraged black separatist thought. Black Americans created a counter image of themselves. Black Rhode Islanders lived in a white dominated nation where blackness was associated with dependence, immorality, inferiority and most damning—slavery. The idea of a prosperous, morally-upright black nation helped black Rhode Islanders cope with the constant assaults on their character. Black nationalism, one of the oldest American political ideologies, was a social and political necessity.[487] Free blacks had to create their own institutions because they were barred from mainstream institutions. Black nationalism was born out of exclusion. The race riots of 1824 and 1831 only strengthened black nationalistic beliefs among black Rhode Islanders.

Antebellum Race Riots

During the first half of the nineteenth century, three conditions created conflict between white and blacks in the "free" northern states. Northern whites lost their legal claim to mastery, the free black population grew exponentially and black people

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[486] Anthony Taylor and Saimar Nubia to Cato Gardner and London Spear for all the Africans in Providence, 24 December 1787, in *The Proceedings*, ed. William Robinson, 19.

[487] Tommie Shelby, *Two Conceptions of Black Nationalism: Martin Delany on the Meaning of Black Political Solidarity*," *Political Theory* 3, no.5 (October 2003), 665.

challenged white supremacy. Gradual emancipation laws put an expiration date on mastery, and both slaveholding and non-slaveholding whites knew that white mastery was a thing of the past. The free black population steadily increased in northern cities, 70% in Boston, 116% in New York and 128% in Providence.[488] As northern blacks successfully bargained for their freedom and took advantage of gradual emancipation laws their numbers doubled, tripled and quadrupled (table 11). Many whites resented the growing free black population, even though the percentage of free blacks dropped every decade. The growth of the free black population was both real and imagined. It was real in the sense that the number of free blacks was rapidly increasing. However, the percentage of free blacks in relation to the total population in northern cities dropped throughout the first half of the nineteenth century (table 11). Freed peoples' challenges to the racial ideology of white supremacy created fear and panic among many white northerners. African Americans built their own institutions and neighborhoods. They increasingly challenged whites in public by refusing to show racial deference. Blacks were no longer slaves, but rather businessmen, homeowners and presidents and officers of self sufficient independent organizations. In the North, whites were threatened by black dependency and independence. They feared black dependency because they believed that freed blacks would become economic burdens; however, they also feared black independence because it posed a challenge to white supremacy. Racial conflict between northern whites and blacks was most saliently expressed in race riots.

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[488] See Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America*.

Table 11: Growth of Black Population in Northern Cities 1800-1850

Cities	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850
Boston	1,174 (4.17%)	1,464 (4.4%)	1,687 (3.97)	1,875 (3.05%)	2,427 (2.6%)	1,999 (1.46%)
New York	6,367 (10.53)	9,823 (10.19)	10,886 (8.80)	13,977 (6.90)	16,358 (5.23)	13,815 (2.68)
Providence	656 (8.62)	871 (8.65)	979 (8.32)	1,213 (7.21)	1,302 (5.62)	1,499 (3.61)

Source: This table was complied from information in Curry's, *The Free Black in Urban America*, 246-257

Race riots, during the antebellum period, were neither common place nor unheard of in the free northern states; there were however the most extreme and telling expressions of racial animosity. While the southern states had fully committed to race-based slavery, northern states had laid the legal ground work to abolish the institution; however, northern whites remained racist. Free blacks were not socially, politically or economic integrated into mainstream white society. In the North, state laws and the mass media marginalized the free black community. While many northern whites may not have condoned slaveholding in their own states, they were not proponents of black equality.[489] In this context, antebellum race riots fell into two categories. The first involved blacks who protected themselves, their friends and families from slavery. The second type of riot, which was the most common, involved violent assaults by whites who perceived challenges to the racial caste system.[490] According to scholar Paul Gilje, in the North, in 1835 alone, there were 46 proslavery riots and 15 race riots. Thirty-five of the proslavery riots were against abolitionist activities; the other 11 were responses to insurrection rumors. Of the 15 race riots, 11 targeted blacks, three were perpetrated by blacks in aid of fugitive slaves, and one was carried out by blacks in response to discrimination. Before 1830, most race riots were small with a few dozen participants; however, after 1830, race riots became increasingly violent and often had hundreds of participants. Black homes, churches and business were the primary target of rioters; blacks were also routinely beaten during riots. There were distinct regional differences in the targets of rioters. Northern white rioters targeted the property of blacks, while southern white rioters targeted black individuals, often as a lynching. However, white

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[489] According to Paul Gilje, a riot is any group of 12 or more people attempting to assert their will immediately through the use of force outside the normal bounds of the law; excluding criminal activity, uprisings, and rebellions. Paul Gilje, *Rioting in America*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1996), 5 and 87.

[490] Gilje, *Rioting in America*, 88-90.

northerners also physically attacked blacks. One antebellum race riot in Philadelphia included rape and castration.[491]

Most race riots took place in black or mixed-raced neighborhoods, because it was in these neighborhoods that African Americans often challenged racial ideology, mixing with whites and running their own businesses. These neighborhoods were often the poorest in the city. The free black population was plagued with poverty, because they were economically marginalized. In most northern cities free blacks were trapped in low paying jobs. In Philadelphia, free blacks workers were heavily concentrated in common labor, they worked as ditch, house and grave diggers, chimney sweeps, ash men, porters, waiters, boot blacks, sailors and washerwomen.[492] Similarly, most blacks in Providence worked as day laborers and domestic servants. In fact, many free blacks in Providence remained dependent on their former owners for their wages.[493] Sailors, barbers, entrepreneurs comprised the "economic upper echelons" of the black community. At the turn of the nineteenth century, in New York, one third of all free blacks lived in white households; they lived in attics or back rooms and performed the same duties they had done as slaves. In fact, one in three white households that employed free blacks also held at least one slave.[494] The line between slave and servant must have been very precarious in these households.

Free blacks who could afford to live on their own were often restricted to the least desirable areas. These enclaves were also home to poverty stricken whites, fugitives, and criminals. Moreover, fringe and extralegal businesses like dancehalls, brothels, and

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[491] David Grimstead, *American Mobbing, 1828-1860: toward the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4 and 16.

[492] Gary Nash, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 165-170.

[493] Pecker, " 'A view of Power', " 50.

[494] White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 157

gambling houses were commonly located in these neighborhoods. In New York, free blacks clustered in working class neighborhoods or low lying areas that housed semi-industrial trades like tanning that polluted the air with foul odors.[495] Free blacks, who were often denied liquor licenses, operated extralegal businesses out of their homes. Hardscrabble and Snowtown were two such enclaves in Providence, Rhode Island. These two enclaves were particular plagued by houses of "ill repute," because Providence had a large transient sailor population. This population boarded in Hardscrabble and Snowtown. Sailors were not only looking for temporary lodging, but access to prostitutes, liquor and gambling. The behavior and demands of sailors were so notorious that barring them from one's boarding house was a sign of gentility.[496]

In Rhode Island, as the free black population grew racist laws were passed. In 1789, interracial marriages were banned. A curfew was instituted for "people of colour" in 1810; they were not to be out or have visitors after 10:00 pm. In 1822, black men were barred from voting, and six years later Providence schools were legally segregated.[497] On October 18, 1824, white Rhode Islanders destroyed nearly all the homes in the predominantly African American neighborhood of Hardscrabble. Seven years later in Snowtown, another predominately African American neighborhood, white Rhode Islanders rioted for four days. It was the first time the state militia had been called to put down a public disturbance.[498] Both of these riots occurred in Providence, where the vast majority of the state's African Americans lived, and began when blacks refused to show

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[495] Ibid., 173-175.

[496] Brown, *The Life of William J. Brown*, 18.

[497] Schools that had once been segregated by practice became segregated by law. Patrick T. Conley and Paul Campbell, *Providence, a Pictorial History*, (Norfolk: The Donning Company, 1982), 38.

[498] Gilje, *Rioting in America*, 5. See Howard P. Chudacoff, "Social Turmoil and Governmental Reform in Providence, 1830-1832," *Rhode Island History* 31, no.1 (1972), 21-32.

public deference to whites. Both riots culminated in the destruction of African American property. The white residents of Providence, like whites throughout the North, were uncomfortable and resentful of the ever increasing independent free black population; and while many of them opposed slavery they were also explicitly racist, sub-consciousness of their loss of mastery.

"Situated in the north west part of the town of Providence, in a romantic glen, and consisted previous to its destruction, of about twenty buildings inhabited by people of colour," Hardscrabble was not only the name of the predominately black neighborhood—the term described its residents.[499] The nineteenth century definition of hardscrabble was simply, "maximum labor for minimal remuneration." The residents of Hardscrabble were often employed in the most difficult labor for the lowest pay.[500]

The cheap rents in Hardscrabble attracted not only the working poor, but also criminals and fugitives of every race. Houses of "ill repute" were common in Hardscrabble—such was the home of Henry T. Wheeler, a black man, who ran a dance hall on the first floor of his two story home. In 1824, on the evening of October 18th, several black Hardscrabble residents refused to step off the sidewalk to let a group of whites pass. Their refusal to show public deference set the stage for violence; Wheeler's home was the first target. Forty whites, carrying clubs and axes, "gathered" in front of the Wheeler residence and began destroying his home. The rioters literally took the home apart. They tore it down to its studs. The rioters were so zealous in their efforts that they

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[499] The Report of the 1824 Hardscrabble Riot is not a transcript of the court trail, but instead a summation of the major arguments and comments made by lawyers, the judge and witnesses. The original is located transcript is housed at Brown University Hay Library. *Hard-Scrabble Calendar Report of the Trails of Oliver Cummins, Nathaniel G. Metcalf, Gilbert Humes, and Arthur Farrier; who were indicted with six other for a Riot, And for aiding in pulling down a Dwelling House, on the 18th of October at Hard-Scrabble* (Providence: Printed for the Purchaser, 1824). Rider Collection Box 217 no. 11.

[500] *Creative Survival: The Providence Black Community in the 19th Century* (Providence: The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society), 40.

took breaks in order to catch their breath. By the close of the evening, the rioters were 50 or 60 strong. They destroyed 20 structures—nearly all of the black owned homes and businesses in Hardscrabble.[501]

Oliver Cummins, Joseph Butler, Nathaniel Metcalf, Amos Chaffee, John Sherman, Gilbert Humes, Arthur Farrier, James Gibbs, Ezra Hubbard and William Taylor were indicted for disturbing the peace and destruction of private property. All the men were white residents of Providence employed as laborers or traders. Butler, Sherman and Taylor were not tried, because the Sheriff could not locate them. All of the other men plead not guilty. The state called dozens of witnesses, who identified Farrier, Metcalf, Humes, and Cummins as agitators and participants in the riot.[502] However, the defense countered with witnesses who testified that Cummins and Humes were not involved in the riot. No such claims were made on behalf or Metcalf and Farrier.

The defense not only claimed that the defendants were not involved, but also defended the actions of the rioters. Mr. Tillinghast, the defense lawyer, repeatedly asked the state's witnesses, "what business was usually carried on in this house [Henry Wheeler's home]?" All the witnesses denied ever frequenting the house and testified they did not know. The state's attorney objected to the line of questioning, stating, "the character of the house was not on trial." The defense attorney replied "they had a right to inquire what sort of a building it was, whether it was a house or a pig-stye." He then asked if the defendant could be "indicted for tearing down a pig stye?"[503] Mr. Tillinghast wanted to prove that the actions of the rioters were justified. The attorney general objected again and "The Court, after consultation, decided the prisoner's Counsel

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[501] See *Hardscrabble Calendar*.

[502] Ibid., 5.

[503] Ibid., 7-8.

had not right to inquire about the character of the house."[504] Despite the court's ruling that the character of the houses destroyed had no bearing on the case, Tillinghast's closing remarks included the following statement: "Like the ancient Babylon it has fallen with all its graven images, its tables of impure oblation, its idolatrous rights and sacrifices, and my client stands here charged with having invaded this classic ground and torn down its altars and its beautiful temples!" In other words, the people of Hardscrabble brought it on themselves; it was their immoral behavior that provoked the "good" citizens of Providence to destroy their neighborhood.

The white rioters' defense was two-fold. On one hand, they argued that there was no conclusive evidence that any of the defendants were involved in the riot, and secondly, they claimed that the rioters had performed a public service. Hardscrabble was a public nuisance and the rioters took care of it. The defendants were not alone in their opinion of Hardscrabble and its residents. The introduction of the official 1824 riot report stated:

> Among this number [upwards of 1200 black persons living in Providence] there are a great many industrious and honest individuals who in their departments render themselves useful members of society; but the mass, as might be inferred, can hardly be considered a valuable acquisition to any community, and their return to the respective places from whence they came, probably would not be considered a public calamity. Between this class and the whites bickerings and antipathies would naturally arise. This has long been partially the case, until on the evening previous to the Riot, a sort of battle royal took place between considerable parties of whites and blacks, in consequence of an attempt of the latter to maintain the inside walk in their peregrinations through the town. If such has been the case heretofore, the moral and orderly town of Providence would not have been disgraced by the existence of a Hard-Scrabble, or of a mob to demolish it.[505]

Cummins and Humes were declared not guilty, because there was conflicting testimonies concerning their involvement. Metcalf and Farrier were found factually, but not legally

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[504] Ibid., 9.

[505] Ibid., Introduction.

guilty. In other words, while the court acknowledged that Metcalf and Farrier were among the rioters, it claimed that it could not determine what damage, if any, the two men were responsible for. Ultimately, no one was punished for the rioting in Hardscrabble and the residents received no compensation for the loss of their property.[506]

In 1831, an evening dispute between several black Olney Lane residents and several white steamboat workers in Snowtown developed into the most violent and deadly riot the city had ever seen.[507] It is difficult to fully understanding the Snowtown, because the primary evidence remaining from the Snowtown riot, *The Committee's Report*, is fundamentally flawed. The committee members themselves noted that,

> The testimony upon which this statement rest, was not gives under oath, nor in the presence of the blacks, and the most material of the witnesses were parties to the affray. How far a close cross-examination of the sailors would qualify the account here give, we are unable to say. Nor can we state what proof, contracting material parts of this narrative, can be furnished by the blacks. Until that proof is produced before the proper tribunal, no opinion as to the comparative guilt of the whites and blacks, outght to be formed [508]

The accounts of the Snowtown Riot were entirely told from the point of view of whites—white rioters and white government officials. According to the authorities, Snowtown was home to "idle blacks, of the lowest stamp" who "have constituted a continuing nuisance of the most offensive manner."[509]

On a Wednesday evening, late in September, several white steamboat workers armed with sticks and clubs approached five white sailors, who had been "on a cruise,"

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[506] Ibid.

[507] The Committee's Report was published in the *Providence Daily Journal*. It is an official accounting of the Snowtown Riot. The report details the events as well as the damage caused by the riots. It is based on the testimonies of the sheriff, governor, militiamen and witnesses (white). "Committee's Report," *Providence Daily Journal* 29 September 1831.

[508] "The Committee's Report."

[509] Ibid.

on Onley Lane. The steamboat workers told the sailors that they had been involved in fight with the "darkies;" they asked the sailors for their help. The group continued up the lane and joined a white crowd of about 100. According to the Committee's Report, it was not clear whether a shot was fired from a home of a Snowtown resident, or if stones were thrown from the crowd towards a home on Onley Lane. Whether it was a stone or a gun shot, the offense served as a catalyst for the riot. Another shot was fired from an Onley Lane home and William Henry, one of the white sailors, cried out that he had been wounded. George Erickson and William Hull, two white rioters, continued up the street and encountered a black man standing on the steps of his home holding a gun. He warned the men to "keep their distance." Ignoring him, they continued up the hill. Snowtown residents repeatedly warned the rioters to stay away. One of the white men (Hull suspected it was Erickson) cried "fire and be damned." He fired. Erickson was shot and mortally wounded. Hull and another rioter sustained non-life threatening injuries.[510] This was the beginning of four nights of violence and destruction in Snowtown.

On the first night of the riot, the rioters were so numerous and out of control that neither Sheriff, his men or state militia were able to pacify the crowd. Consequently, they retreated and left the rioters to their destruction. The mob reassembled the next evening on Onley Street. The news that a black man had shot and killed a white man had spread through town; the white residents of Providence were outraged. Anticipating another night of violence, the sheriff and his men arrested seven white agitators from the crowd. Nevertheless, they were unable to control the rioters as their numbers increased throughout the night. In fact, the rioters threw stones and bricks at the sheriff and his men. Again the sheriff asked the Governor for assistance. The 1st Light Infantry, consisting of 25 men, marched onto Prospect Street toward Onley's Lane between 9:00 and 10:00 pm. The mob attacked them and they retreated. The sheriff and the military

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[510] Ibid.

were convinced that "nothing short of firing would produce any other effect than increased irritation and ferocity in the mob."[511] The rioters followed the retreating soldiers throwing stones. Several soldiers sustained injures—from head wounds to minor bruises. That night, the rioters tore down several more black homes, broke windows and assaulted at least two black residents. The crowd did not disperse until 4:00 am.[512]

On the third day of unrest the rioters planned to break into the jail and release the seven men who had been arrested the day before. In a preemptive move, the local magistrates processed the accused men on the same day. Four were released due to insufficient evidence and the remaining three were bound out over to a superior tribunal and released. Even so, 30 to 50 rioters gathered in front of the jail on Friday evening to call for the release of their fellow rioters. After considerable persuasion the sheriff was able to convince the rioters that the prisoners had already been released.[513]

On the fourth evening of the riot, the state was better prepared. By 6:00 pm, 130 militia men had been mustered. Under the authority of the governor, the militia men were marched over to Smith's Bridge, in Snowtown, where a white mob had gathered. One rioter disarmed a militia man which led to a brief clash between rioters and soldiers. Requests from the governor and the sheriff for the crowd to disperse and return home were met with angry chants of "fire and be damned."[514] The militia men, seemingly out of options, finally fired on the crowd. Their actions ended four days of civil disorder. When all was said and done, four homes had been completely destroyed; 8 homes were severely damaged; 4 men (one white; three black) lost their lives and 13 were seriously wounded.

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[511] Ibid.

[512] Ibid.

[513] Ibid.

[514] Ibid.

The town council condemned the mob for their "lawless attack upon private property, provoking insults and aggravated assaults;" however, they blamed the victims.[515] According to the Committee's Report the, rioters targeted "houses of suspicious reputation;" their targeted rioting was used to justify the destruction of black property. The Committee members asserted that respectable residents of Snowtown did not stop the rioters, because they too were tired of the "ordinary evils of the houses of ill fame."[516] The committed failed to consider that the residents of Snowtown were in no position to defend themselves or their neighbors. They were busy fleeing their homes caring beds, bedding, chairs, tables and other personal property.[517] No one was held accountable for the Snowtown Riots and no compensation was offered to its victims. In less than a decade, two black enclaves were attacked in Providence, and in both situations the victims were blamed. According to the authorities, black Rhode Islanders brought it on themselves.

Free blacks did indeed engage in extralegal businesses such as gaming houses, dance hall and brothels, because they were often denied access to legitimate business opportunities. However, many of their clients, as noted by the civil authorities, were the white citizens of Providence. Therefore, it stands to reason that some in the mob were customers of the businesses they destroyed. Even the white authorities condemned whites who frequented the businesses and residences of the Snowtown neighborhood. Asserting:

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515 "Town-Meeting Resolutions from September 25, 1831" *Providence Daily Journal* 29 September 1831.

516 "The Committee's Report."

517 *The American Providence* Evening 24 September 24, 1831.

> The blacks of this town have been unusually bold for the last few weeks and have repeatedly defied the civil authority. But in this case, we must go higher, and let the blame fall upon those who encouraged and countenance their dissolute habits and trade of living. If these huts and brothels which have caused the town so much expense and trouble were not let out the manner they are the number of disorderly blacks would be _____ and their characters generally improved. But as long as they can hire one room, and get money sufficient to purchase fish and rum, we can never look for improvement.[518]

According to the officials the problem was not only the existence of quasi-legal black owned businesses, but also the white patrons that supported them.

Conclusion

Black poverty and community building as well as white violence revealed the legacy of race-based slavery and piecemeal emancipation. Despite their poverty, black Rhode Islanders determinedly struggle to build a cohesive community in the newly formed United States. Groups of civic minded free blacks established and maintained self-help organizations to address racial discrimination. With sophistication and clarity they critiqued the racial caste system. They clearly understood they were apart from, not a part of, the nation that claimed equality for all. They sought to better themselves through geographic mobility as well as by building unions, schools, meeting houses and churches. The economic and social disabilities they faced led the free black community to turn inward. Their relentless pursuit of institution building demonstrated their perseverance. Out of uncertainty and insecurity, they formed organizations to secure their futures in a racially hostile state and nation.

Free black Rhode Islanders focused on making their lives better in the United States, after their plans to return to Africa were thwarted. The Free African Union Society, the African Benevolent Society, the Female African Benevolent Society and the African Union Meeting House were the spiritual, social, and political centers of the free

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518 *The American Providence* Evening 24 September 1831.

black community in Rhode Island, just as mutual aid societies were the cornerstones of free black communities throughout the North.

The Snowtown and Hardscrabble riots revealed tension between blacks and whites as well as how the state viewed blacks and disruptive white citizens. Both reports produced by the state clearly sympathize with white rioters. White officials contended that free blacks were a nuisance and immoral, while riotous whites were just attempting to keep the black hordes at bay. White Rhode Islanders were grappling with the loss of mastery; many whites were determined to maintain the racial ideology of white supremacy and black dependency, even through violent means. The Hardscrabble and Snowtown riots exposed the concerns, prejudices, and resentments that white Rhode Islanders had towards free blacks. But, perhaps more importantly they highlight the behaviors of free blacks in Providence. These free blacks were not staying in "their place." White rioters in Rhode Island were attempting to intimidate and scare black Rhode Islanders into submission, they were responding to a threat to the racial caste system. These race riots were not irrational; there were reasons and meanings behind the actions of the rioters. As free blacks built their own institutions and neighborhoods, their efforts became the target of white rage.[519] In Rhode Island free blacks built a free community in face of adversity. Their tenacious pursuit of community building through institution building was truly remarkable.

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[519] Gilje, *Rioting*, 6-10.

CHAPTER 5

"AS MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL TO THE NORTH AND SOUTH:" THE NEGRO CLOTH INDUSTRY IN RHODE ISLAND, 1815-1855

The history of the textile industry in the United States reveals intimate connections between northern manufactures, southern slaveholders and enslaved African Americans; this is especially true of the negro cloth industry. Northern industrialists bought and processed slave-picked cotton, while southern slaveholders purchased northern manufactured cloth for themselves and their slaves. The antebellum textile industry, like the Atlantic slave trade, became an essential part of the North's involvement in the perpetuation of the institution of slavery.[520] Although the negro cloth industry was a small segment of the New England textile industry, it represents the most salient example of the cooperation between the "loom and lash." Negro cloth (also known as Linsey, Osnaburg and Kersey) was a cheap, coarse, and strong wool or cotton-wool blend cloth used to make clothing for enslaved African Americans in the southern United States.

Rhode Islanders were among the leading producers of "negro cloth" in the United States. Nearly every northern state produced negro cloth; however, Rhode Island textile manufacturers were almost exclusively devoted to its production.[521] By 1850, 79% of all

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[520] In 1816, large-scale textile factories employed about 1% of the New England work force. Thirty-six years later, in 1852, the industry employed 14% of the labor force; and by 1860 New England was home to 472 cotton mills. Women and children made up the majority of textile mill laborers. Jacqueline Jones, *American Work: Black and White Labor* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 160 and Ronald Bailey, " 'Those valuable People, the Africans:' The Economic Impact of the Slave(ry) Trade on Textile Industrialization in New England," in *The Meaning of Slavery in the North* eds. David Roediger and Martin H. Blatt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 13.

[521] Only the banks in Manhattan and London were big enough to extend massive lines of credit to plantations owners who often bought seed, farming equipment and slaves on credit. Anne Farrow, et al., *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited From Slavery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), 13.

Rhode Island textile mills manufactured negro cloth.[522] White Rhode Islanders had accepted the eradication of slavery within their state, yet they remained heavily invested in the institution of slavery outside of their own borders through the production of negro cloth.

Between 1800 and 1870, 84 negro cloth mills opened in Rhode Island. The majority of these mills were concentrated in the southern half of the state, which during the colonial period had the highest concentration of slaves and slaveholders. Rhode Islanders' past experiences with slaveholding, slave trading and supplying slave societies with basic necessities put them in a unique position to meet southern plantation owners' demands for durable slave clothing. These sons and grandsons of slaveholders and merchants were familiar with the institution of slavery; they understood the wants and needs of the master class their predecessors had once belonged to.

To date, histories of the negro cloth industry, which have been very brief, have focused on basic facts of when and where negro cloth textile factories opened and closed.[523] Moreover, the vast majority of studies of the textile industry have focused on how the "industrial order" changed the lives of American workers.[524] This analysis,

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[522] The Negro Cloth industry was heavily concentrated in New England; one third of all the cloth produced at the famed Lowell Mills, in Massachusetts, was worn by slaves on southern plantations. Myron O. Stachiw, " 'For the Sake of Commerce": Slavery, Antislavery, and Northern Industry," in *The Meaning of Slavery in the North,* ed. David Roediger and Martin H. Blatt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 33-36.

[523] Stachiw, " 'For the Sake of Commerce'." Peter Stewart, "A Brief History of the Peace Dale Manufacturing Company, 1802-1918," *Textile History Review* 4, no. 1(January 1963): 12-23. Tony Horwitz, "La Chanson de Roland: A Short History of Peace Deale, Rhode Island," (January 23, 1977), Rhode Island Historical Society (Providence, Rhode Island).

[524] The textile industry transformed New England towns. Textile factories were often the sole employers in towns throughout the New England; consequently, the mills dictated the rhythms of daily life. Mary Blewett, *Constant Turmoil: the politics of industrial life in nineteenth-century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2000). Jonathan Prude, *The coming of industrial order, town and factory life in rural Massachusetts, 1810-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work, The transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (New York:

instead, focuses on the relationship between northern industrialists and southern planters. White Rhode Islanders' intense investment in the negro cloth industry illuminates the legacy of slavery in the state, and reveals how central the businesses of slavery remained to Rhode Island local economy throughout the antebellum era. Decades after Rhode Islanders passed a gradual emancipation law, they remained heavily invested in the institution of slavery through the production of negro cloth. The business relations between Rhode Island producers and southern slave owners were initially patriotic and cooperative; however, southern planters quickly became resentful of the profits of the northern textile owners. An investigation of one of the most successful negro cloth manufacturers, the Hazards of Rhode Island, expose how northern manufacturers personally involved in the perpetuation of southern slavery. Finally, this analysis evaluates how enslaved people lived in, and altered, the northern-made clothing allotted to them by their southern masters.

Textile Industry in Rhode Island and New England

(1815-1865)

New England, once home to the American slave trade, would also become home to the negro cloth industry. In the eighteenth century they traded slaves, and in the nineteenth century they clothed them. Notably, the first textile mill in Rhode Island was opened by an abolitionist. Moses Brown, one of the founders of the Providence Abolition Society, opened the Brown and Almay Mill in 1789. Brown thought that his new business venture was a good alternative to slave trading. However, textile mills used slave-grown cotton, a fact that his pro-slavery brother John Brown was quick to point out: "The slaves do the work." He noted, "I can recollect no place at present from whence the cotton can

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Columbia University Press, 1979). Steve Dunwell, *The Run of the Mill (* Boston: David R. Godine , 1978).

come, but from the labor of the slaves."[525] John Brown clearly and succinctly highlighted the hypocrisy of his abolitionist brother's new business venture.

The invention of the cotton gin (1793) transformed the textile industry. Eli Whitney's gin allowed for quick and easy seed removal, which increased production fifty fold.[526] Whitney's invention opened the southern cotton market to New Englanders, who no longer had to shy away from seedy short staple southern cotton. Nevertheless, New England manufacturers were far behind the British, who had decades of experience in mechanized spinning and weaving. Consequently, New Englanders found it difficult to compete with British quality and price—especially when it came to negro cloth. British cloth was usually of a better quality and cheaper than American manufactured cloth. However, the War of 1812 and the 1824 tariff on British foreign manufactured goods allowed New Englanders to break into the market.[527] They took full advantage, and quickly infiltrated the southern markets. By 1815, Rhode Island was home to nearly three-fifths of southern New England's cotton factories. However, by 1831 Massachusetts had twice as many mills, and Rhode Island cotton manufacturers struggled

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[525] James Campbell, "Slavery and Justice Report of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice," 2006 <http://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/> (2006), 26. *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, 28 February 1789.

[526] Prior to Whitney's cotton gin it took one person an entire day to hand remove seeds from just one pound of cotton; Whitney' invention increased production by fifty fold. Farrow, *Complicity*, 9.

[527] Domestic manufacturers flourished during the wartime (War of 1812-1815) collapse of international commerce. Consequently following the war in 1816 there were congressional decades about whether or not congress should implement a tariff to protect domestic manufacturers. However, the 1816 debates only focused on short term policies that would give domestic manufacturers the opportunity to catch-up. The tariff issue was again raised in 1822 elections which resulted in a series of debates in 1824. The tariff debates of 1824 (December 1823 to April of 1824) considered a general, permanent tariff to protect domestic industry. There was a regional divide among the congressmen. The central states, invoking the free trade theories of Adam Smith, overwhelming opposed the bill while the southern and eastern states, arguing protectionism using mercantilist economics, strongly supported the bill. The bill passed and was directly responsible for the massive growth of U.S. textile industry in the antebellum era. See Richard C. Edwards, "Economic Sophistication in Nineteenth Century Congressional Tariff Debates," *Journal of Economic History* 30, no. 4 (December, 1970): 802-838

to compete with textiles from both Britain and Massachusetts. Rhode Islanders turned to a niche in the textile industry—the negro cloth market.[528] Negro cloth only needed to be cheap and strong. It was a perfect match for fledgling textile manufactures in Rhode Island. Throughout the antebellum period, Rhode Island successfully challenged British domination of the negro cloth industry.[529] In many ways, the negro cloth mills in Rhode Island were extensions of the Atlantic slave trade and trade with West Indian planters. White Rhode Islanders had dominated the North American trade in slaves and supplied West Indian sugar plantations with basic necessities for well over a century. In fact, they were practiced merchants familiar with coastal trading routes. They also had long established economic ties and personal connections to southern slaveholders. Consequently, many Rhode Islanders spent considerable amounts of time in the South; and some of them even married Southerners.[530]

A Dependent, but Contentious Relationship—Northern Industrialists and Southern Planters

Northern industrialists and southern planters had an interdependent relationship. Northerners bought their raw materials such as iron, steel and cotton from southerners,

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[528] Susan Oba's undergraduate thesis "Mostly Made, Especially for This Purpose, in Providence, R.I.," provides one of the first analytical histories of the Negro Cloth Industry. She carefully details the history of the Negro Cloth Industry in Rhode Island, and the local pro-slavery movement. Oba's thesis was extremely useful in putting together the factual ground work for this interpretation; however, this analysis asks broader questions. Olmstead remarked on the clothing of slaves during a visit to Virginia in 1853. However, he wrongly identified Providence as the center of the Negro Cloth Industry in Rhode Island; the industry was heavily concentrated in the Narragansett. Frederick Law Olmstead, *Journeys and explorations in the cotton kingdom. A traveler's observations on cotton and slavery in the American slave states. Based upon three former volumes of journeys and investigations* (London: S, Low, Son and Co., 1861), 82 and Susan Oba, "Mostly Made, Especially for This Purpose, in Providence, R.I.": The Rhode Island Negro Cloth Industry (Honors Thesis Brown University April 18, 2006), 20-24.

[529] George H. Gibson, "The Mississippi Market for Woolen Goods: An 1822 Analysis," *The Journal of Southern History* 31, no. 1 (Feb.,1965), 83.

[530] Stachiw, " 'For the Sake of Commerce': Rhode Island, Slavery and the Textile Industry," 2.

who in turn purchased ready-made clothing, shoes, blankets, tools and household goods. This co-dependent relationship was most visible in the negro cloth industry. Abolitionists coined the business relationship between northern industrialists and southern planters as the union of "the Lords of the Lash and the Lords of the Loom." The northern textile industry benefitted from the institution of slavery in multiple ways. First and foremost, profits from the slave trade and supplying slave societies with basic necessities helped fund the textile revolution in the United States.[531] Moreover, enslaved African Americans in the southern U.S. produced the bulk of the world's cotton, and almost all of the cotton consumed by the U.S. textile industry between 1815 and 1865. Finally, northern manufacturers sold much of their manufactured cotton to southern planters. On the eve of the Civil War, countless northern businesses, including insurance firms, railroad and shipping companies, and banks were dependent upon slave-grown cotton and the cotton trade.[532]

When northern industrialists first began producing negro cloth, it was considered, by northerners and southerners alike, as a nationalist enterprise that freed southern slaveholders from economic dependency on British manufacturers. An 1822 newspaper noted on U.S. manufacturing,

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[531] See Gavin Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2006).

[532] By 1824 cotton was the nation's number one export. During the antebellum era America's biggest and richest city, New York, was built on the cotton trade. By 1850 there were 2.3 million slaves in the American South and nearly two million of them were involved in cotton cultivation. By 1860 the U.S. was producing 66% of the world's cotton. Farrow, *Complicity*, 4-10. Bailey, " 'Those valuable People, the Africans,' " (13).

> Let our manufacturing establishments grow up themselves, without giving them monopoly to the injury of other great national interests, but at the same time affording them all necessary and reasonable protection, and they will stand upon a sure foundation, and contribute essentially to the wealth and independence of the country. We accidently dropped into the warehouse of the American Commission Company the other day, and our attention was called to a new kind of manufacture. It is a coarse cloth of cotton and wool, designed as a substitute for the article known by name of Negro Cloth, and heretofore imported for the clothing of the slaves of the southern states.[533]

There was considerable hope that American textile manufacturers could replace the British in the production of negro cloth. The American Commission Company sent samples to the South for testing. They received two glowing replies. A letter from a southern mercantile house stated: "For the benefit of the makers of the cloth, we have sent sample of it to several of our most wealthy and influential planters, and have the satisfaction to say, that they have invariably approved of it. We have no doubt that you will have a considerable demand from this state, as well as from the slave states generally." The second letter from Judge Tait, planter in Alabama and a former Georgia Senator, wrote:

> I have no doubt but this cloth is superior, in every respect, for negro clothing during the winter, to English plains. It will give equal warmth, and I think, will be found much more durable. A suit of plains is but a miserable apology for winter clothing for our field slaves….We frequently find our people in rags before the end of winter. It appears from your statement that the cloth, composed of cotton and wool, can be now sold in this market cheap as plains: this together with the advantage of wearing better, will doubtless, give it the preference to imported stuffs, for negro clothing.[534]

When northern mills first began producing negro cloth, their efforts were eagerly supported by southern slaveholders. In fact, articles appeared in southern papers reminding planters to buy American made negro cloth, "[We] think it may be of some service to the cause of domestic industry and to the merchants of the south, now in this

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533 "American Manufacturers," *Daily National Intelligencer*, 17 June 1822, Issue 2942 column B.

534 "American Manufacturers," *Daily National Intelligencer*, 17 June 1822, Issue 2942 column B.

city, again to call their attention to this cheap, firm and durable fabrick."[535] However, by the 1830s southerners began to resent the financial success the northern industrialists had attained from their sales to the South. Consequently, the relationship between northern textile manufacturers and southern planters was one of dependency and contention.

Southern planters became acutely aware and resentful of their dependence on northern manufacturing as part of a growing regional conflict. Louisiana's Governor, asserted in 1831 that:"From the northern and eastern states, we purchase every article of necessity and luxury, every sort of agricultural improvement necessary to the cultivation of the soil, negro clothing to an enormous amount; steam engines and machinery amounting in the aggregate to three million of dollars, annually."[536] Another editorial, calling for southern self-sufficiency, now described northern—rather than British manufacturers as abroad foreigners,

> We say, then let every farmer, or planter endeavor for the present, to live within his own means, until a state of things is produced which will make it to his interest to do otherwise. For, instance we send abroad for clothing for our negroes. Who reaps the profits? The manufacturer abroad. Let us make these articles at home until they can be supplied us by Southern, but particularly Georgia.[537]

Southerners resented the profits northern textile manufactures were making off negro cloth. Consequently, they sought to build their own manufacturing base—especially in the urban centers of Georgia, Mississippi and Louisiana— in the center of the new South.[538] In 1839, a cotton manufacturing mill opened in New Orleans and mill owners

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535 "Negro Clothing," *Louisiana Public Advertiser*, 16 November 1822, Issue 429 column D.

536 "Extracts from the Message of the Governor of Louisiana," *Southern Times and State Gazette*, 29 January 1831, Issue 8; column D.

537 "Agricultural Southern Prosperity," *Raymond Gazette*, 30 January 1846, Issue 33; column A.

538 "New Orleans Cotton Factory," *The Daily Atlas* 8 September 1841, Issue 59 column F. "Manufacturers in Mississippi," *The Mississippian* 19 March 1845, Issue 12 column A.

claimed that their negro cloth was "preferred by the planters to northern fabrics at the same price; because they are stouter and more durable."[539] In 1847, another cotton mill, Messrs. Wood and Clarkson, opened in Natchez. A Natchez editorial bragged that the company was "prepared to manufacture all the heavy fabrics for negro clothing, cotton and woolen battings, ploughliness, tie yarn….as substantially and cheaply as can be made, and will dispose of the same on terms as reasonable and they can be procured anywhere." Southern editorialists argued for local patronage, one stated:

> "[E]ncourage those who live in our midst and who contribute their proportion of labor and means to the advancement of the general wealth and prosperity, than others who live thousands of miles distant from us and who have not immediate interest in our fortunes."[540]

By the 1850s southern manufacturers were explicitly attacking northern textile manufacturers:

> We are most happy to announce that among our Natchez merchants who are determined to stand by and give a preference to Southern manufacture over those in the North, William K. Henry, Esq., of Cotton Square, is conspicuous. He can fill the most extensive plantation orders for excellent Osnaburgs, and other fabrics for negro clothing, all the manufacture of our neighboring State, Louisiana at Baton Rouge. Mr. Henry will warrant the goods to be superior articles, at more reasonable prices than the Northern manufactures. Now there is a chance for those who really wish to encourage the manufacture of our great Southern staple at home to come forward, and show their sincerity by their deeds.[541]

Southern manufacturers used the same rhetoric and tactics that the northern textile producers had used against the British just decades before; national trade protectionism had been replaced with regional trade protectionism because of growing regional hostility. The North's business of slavery had became newly contentious, and regional

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539 "Multiple News Items," *The Emancipator*, 28 March 1839, page 192 Issue 48 column E.

540 "Southern Manufactures," *The Semi—Weekly Natchez Courier*, 25 June 1847, Issue 51 column B.

541 "Southern Patronage to Southern Manufactures," *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette*, 12 March 1851, Issue 9 column E.

hostilities contributed to the growth of northern regional identity in opposition to the slaveholding South. The relationship between southern planters and northern textile manufacturers continued to deteriorate, just as the relationship between northern and southern whites fell apart over the expansion of slavery into the new western states. Moreover, northern whites were also split over the issue of slavery.

From Slaveholding to the Negro Cloth Industry, the Hazard Family

The Hazards were the most successful negro cloth manufacturers in Rhode Island. Surprisingly, Peace Dale Manufacturing was founded by a son of an abolitionist—Thomas Hazard. Thomas (1720 – 1798), also known as "College Tom," was born into a slaveholding family in the Narragansett. However, as an adult he converted to the Quaker faith and became one of the leading proponents of Rhode Island's 1784 Gradual Emancipation Law. He remained an abolitionist even after being threatened with disinheritance.[542] Nevertheless, Thomas Hazard's son and grandsons ran one of the most successful negro cloth mills in the country. In 1789, Tom's son Rowland Hazard (1763-1835), a moderately successful merchant, financed a mercantile firm (Hazard and Ayrault) in Charleston, South Carolina. The firm was primarily involved in trade with the West Indies and commission shipping. While Hazard ran the firm's branch in Rhode Island, he made numerous trips to Charleston where he met his wife Mary Peace, the daughter of a prominent Charleston merchant. In 1802, Rowland Hazard used the capital from his partnership in Hazard and Aryault to purchase a half interest in a mill on the Saugatucket River. Three years later, he acquired a carding machine which allowed him to open the Narragansett Cotton Manufacturing Company. During the first decade of operation, the mill produced gingham and linen which was spun by hand. Rowland

[542] Oba, "Mostly Made, Especially For This Purpose, in Providence, RI," 7-9.

Hazard's sons transformed the mill into a thriving business that supplied plantations from South Carolina to Alabama with negro cloth. [543]

Issac Hazard joined his father's business in 1810, and in 1813 they purchased a power loom. This purchase allowed the Hazards to greatly expand their business and produce negro cloth in mass. Rowland turned the company over to his sons, Issac and Rowland G. (1801 – 1888), in 1819. In 1826, the brothers bought out the last investors. Two years later, Joseph (1807 – 1892), the youngest Hazard son, joined the family business. Rowland's sons, renamed the mill, Peace Dale Manufacturing, in honor of their mother, Mary Peace Hazard (1794 – 1879). The Hazard family manufactured negro cloth for over forty years.[544] The mill's profits also provided funding for other business pursuits, including a general store in Providence, part ownership in Pier Railroads (Providence, Stonington and the Narragansett) and the Wisconsin Central Railroad.[545] In 1823, the mill was worth $6,000. Twenty four years later, in 1847, the mill was worth $140,000.[546] While the Peace Dale mill is the focus of this analysis, it is important to note the Hazards ran several mills throughout the state (figure 7). Profits from the negro cloth industry allowed Rhode Islanders to directly invest in the infrastructure of their state.

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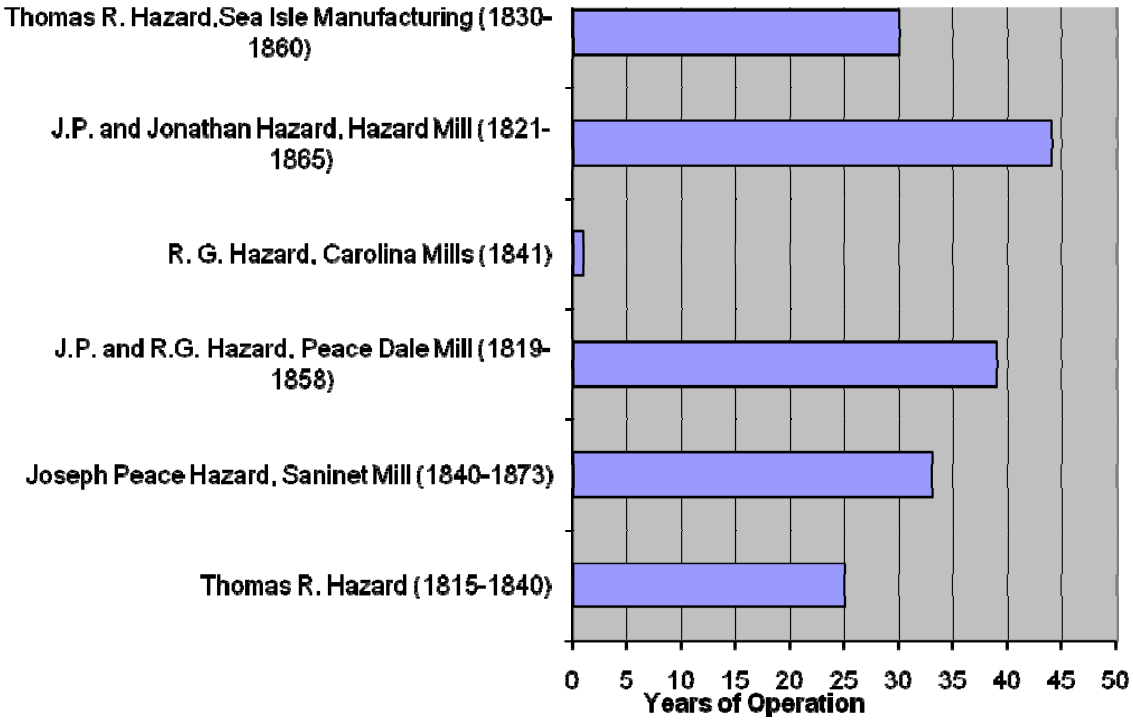
[543] Rowland Hazard was the first American to employ water power for carding wool and using power looms. Horowitz, "La Chanson de Roland," 2-4.

[544] See Caroline E. Robinson, *The Hazard Family of Rhode Island; Being a Genealogy and History of the Descendants of Thomas Hazard, with Sketches of the Worthies of the Family, and Anecdotes Illustrative of their Traits and also of the Times in which they Lived* (Boston: Printed for the Author, 1896), 77-78.

[545] The Peace Dale Manufacturing Company, Mss 446, 1742-1919, Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School, (Boston, Massachusetts).

[546] Although the Hazard declared bankruptcy in 1829 the mill recovered quickly. In 1830 the mill employed 23 carders, 36 spinners, 16 mule spinners and 6 weavers which was nearly doubled the number of employees in 1820. Furthermore, in 1837 the Hazards had their dam raised which indicated they needed more power. And by 1860 the mill employed over 100 people. Horowitz, "La Chanson de Roland," 4-6.

Figure 7: Hazard Negro Cloth Mills (Rhode Island), 1815-1873



Source: This graph is based on information from an exhibit at the Museum of Rhode Island History in 1982. Stachiw, " 'For the Sake of Commerce.' "

The Hazard sons (Rowland G., Isaac and Joseph), all of whom were educated at Quaker institutions, were no strangers to the institution of slavery. Their mother was raised in Charleston, South Carolina, by two Barbadians. Mary Peace grew up in a thriving slave society.[547] Furthermore, the Hazard brothers routinely traveled to South Carolina for business and personal reasons, and usually stayed on family plantations. Slavery was part of their lives.

The Hazard brothers' initial attempts to expand the business were only moderately successful. This was largely due to their inexperience in the industry; they were attempting to sell all-wool cloth. Their mill did not offer a cotton-wool blend which was stronger and more durable. Consequently, Peace Dale agents were often unable to sell the Hazards' cloth at market. In 1818, Nathan Wilcox, a Peace Dale agent, wrote "I could not sell your cloth at the prices you put on them during my short stay in Boston." Over four years later, another mill agent wrote:

> Since our Fall Sale have commenced I have not been able to affect a sale of any of your goods nor do I seem to have any prospect of doing so, with me they seem to be totally undesirable. I have given them a fair trail at public and private sale. I would recommend your transferring the good in my hands to some other house who may have regular customers for this description of goods wither is Battu, Philadelphia or New York.[548]

In 1823, during a trip to Philadelphia, Isaac discovered why they sometimes found it difficult to sell their cloth. Hugh Auchincloss, a successful British negro cloth dealer, told him that some planters preferred the cotton-wool blend to the all-wool cloth. Auchincloss' advice was confirmed when Issac was unable to sell their cloth to planters in Charleston, South Carolina, because they were not satisfied with the quality and

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[547] "Oba, "Mostly Made, Especially For This Purpose, in Providence, RI," 28.

[548] Nathan Wilcox to Issac Hazard 1 January 1818 (Exter) and Joseph King to Isaac and Thomas Hazard 3 October, 1822 (Battu) Mss 483 sg 12 Box 1 Issac Peace Hazard Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, (Providence Rhode Island).

weight of the Peace Dale cloth.[549] The Hazards were simultaneously receiving requests for thicker, cheaper and coarser material. Joseph King, one of the mill's major distributors, wrote:

> Within a short time we have had several application for Negro Cloths or Linseys different in substance from those we have of your manufacture they are wanted to be about 4/4_____ of the cheapest cotton not very particular as to the quality of the wool but they must be must thicker and heavier say _____ 10 oz or more per yard. We are informed larger quantities are wanted of this description_____ you will forward us 10 or 12 _____ much as above described with the lowest price they can be afforded for we will endeavor to send purchases that will contract for large quantities _____ market is well supplied with the kind of Wool desirable to make this kind of goods which can be bought very reasonable—please write us by mail on this subject.[550]

By the 1825 the Hazards were producing both all-wool and cotton-wool blend clothing. This change resulted in regular orders for their goods.

In the negro cloth industry, manufacturers had to do more than produce a good product; they had to establish trust with their customers. The Hazard brothers made sure to cultivate relationships with planters during their travels. In a letter from Charleston, Isaac explained the importance of developing personal relationship with planters to his brother Rowland:

> as I have got acquainted with a number of Planters should Ketchum and Ripley [sale agents] not contract with us I think I can sell as we make to advantage Ripley I believe is aware of this and would give us the preference he says we must each keep the Secrets of the business as no other house but theirs in this city know enough of domestics to know what will answer.[551]

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[549] Isaac to Rowland 10 December 1823 (Philadelphia) and Isaac to Rowland 2 December 1824 (Charleston) Rowland G. and Caroline (Newbold) Hazard Papers Mss 483 sg 5 Box 1, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, (Providence Rhode Island).

[550] Robert Rogersond to Thomas R. Hazard 1822 Mss 483 sg 12 Box 1 Issac Peace Hazard Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, (Providence Rhode Island).

[551] Issac Peace Hazard to Rowland G. Hazard 4 March 1824 (Charleston) Mss 483 sg 5 Box 1 Folder 2 1824, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, (Providence Rhode Island).

Gaining the trust and recommendations of southern planters was essential to the Harzards' success. The Hazards also took special orders. For a rice planter in South Carolina they produced "7/8 warps weighing from 14 to 18 ounces—the colours may be grey, Blue, and white, chiefly blue, the double width's will not answer so well – they must be dressed so as to be soft and warm not too high slayed yet as firm as a board."[552] By developing personal relationships with planters and catering to their specific needs, the Hazards secured a place for themselves in the negro cloth industry, as exemplified in the following 1825 letter from a distributor in New York:

> the prospect of a very good business season here, has become quite certain. Many of our customers are already in, large supplies will be required. If you have any parcels of goods on hand, and you will send them to us, we make no doubt we shall be able to make very satisfactory account sales for you. We should be pleased to receive a few bales of your Negro Cloth as we know they will do well.[553]

Their goods had become sought-after commodities. The Hazards also eagerly sought out advice on how to better produce goods for the southern market. In 1829, Issac Hazard inquired, "Could we serve you in anyway it would give us pleasure and shall be pleased to have your views on the subject of manufacturing materials for plantations either as clothing or utensils, wherever anything may present itself to your views as mutually beneficial to the North and South."[554] They also directly advertised to their customers. An 1836 advertisement in a New Orleans paper described their products and services to local planters. The Hazards were so successful that they sometimes had to outsource orders. Mills in Rhode Island and Massachusetts benefitted from the success of the

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[552] Issac Peace Hazard to Rowland G. Hazard 4 March 1824 (Charleston) Mss 483 sg 5 Box 1 Folder 2 "1824," Rhode Island Historical Society Library, (Providence Rhode Island).

[553] Pickering Kendall Pope to Issac Hazard 1 August 1825 Mss 483 sg 12 Box 1 Issac Peace Hazard Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, (Providence Rhode Island).

[554] Isaac Hazard to J.H. Couper Esqu 5 January 1829 Mss 483 sg 12 Box 1 Issac Peace Hazard Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, (Providence, Rhode Island).

Hazard brothers. In fact, their success led their friends and neighbors to open negro cloth mills.[555]

The Hazard brothers successfully utilized a multipronged sales approach. Some of their cloth was sold and shipped via New York.[556] They also had sales agents in major cities, in the North and the South, and sold their cloth out of dry good stores throughout the country. Finally, they sold directly to planters. Their business strategy exposes how central the cotton trade, the negro cloth industry in particular, was to everyday business in the North. Moreover, northerners did not simply benefit from producing negro cloth; they also profited from shipping it to the South. The Harzard's products were available in all areas of the market, from established stores to factory direct sales. In 1835, Rowland Hazard traveled to New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Mobile with samples of his negro cloth. He acquired major orders in all three cities. "I have made engagements which will _____ our cloths among the planters very generally. They almost all want the double kersey and think it an excellent article. They want them in July, August 1 – 1 September." They sold to planters large and small. In fact, they even sold to a Louisiana Senator Robert C. Nicholas. According to Issac Hazard the senator said that "his negroes" were "delighted with it [negro cloth] and call it the iron and say it will never wear out." The Hazards also manufactured "Sunday clothes" for slaves. John Elliot, a planter, ordered "suits made for all his negroes for Sunday clothes." The brothers also catered to the particularities of the planters who wanted certain shades of negro cloth. One planter wrote, "On examining and comparing your I,K kersey with the pattern left us by your brother we found them to have a less proportion of wool in and consequently

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555 Oba, "Mostly Made, Especially For This Purpose, in Providence, RI," 40-41, 43.

556 "We have shipped you by way of New York to case of Mexwell J. King Savannah 5 bales of Negro Cloth mid." R.G.H. to Jonathan Bousess By direction of James Hamilton 11 August 1828 Mss 483 sg 12 Box 1 Issac Peace Hazard Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, (Providence, Rhode Island).

lighter in color and not so desirable. If the remainder of our order is not executed on the except of this you will please not do it."[557] The business strategy of the Hazard brothers was comprehensive; their goods were available in every facet of the market, and they catered to all slaveholders, large and small.

The business correspondence between Issac and Rowland Hazard reveals important elements about the negro cloth industry. First, it was an intimate business, and secondly, northern manufacturers were comfortable with and supportive of the institution of slavery. Northern manufacturers were not distant suppliers to plantations they knew nothing about. The Hazards were door–to-door salesmen who took orders and suggestions directly from southern plantation owners. The Hazard brothers were not content to send agents to the South to take orders; they preferred to assess the needs of the planters in person. For these northern industrialists, slavery then was not a distant institution. The brothers even commented on the management styles of the planters. In 1829, Issac Hazard wrote: "We got an order today from J.H. Couper for 2900 yds of milled double Kersey…..The high character of J.H. Couper [a planter and client] as a Planter and careful human manager of Negroes is well known."[558] For the Hazards, Couper not simply a customer, but a man they admired. The Hazards also sold tools to southern planters, especially those they considered friends. In 1830, Isaac Hazard ordered two dozen axes for one of his "friends from the South;" he made sure they were "of the

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[557] Rowland Hazard to Isaac Hazard February 1835 (New Orleans); Rowland Hazard to Isaac Hazard 6 February 1835 (Baton Rouge), Rowland Hazard to Isaac Hazard 15 February 1835 (New Orleans), Rowland Hazard to Isaac Hazard 13 January 1836 (New Orleans), Rowland Hazard to Isaac Hazard 1 February 1836 (Natchez) and I and C Lawton to Issac Hazard October 1837 (Charleston) Mss 483 sg 12 Isaac Peace Hazard Papers Box 2 Rhode Island Historical Society Library, (Providence, Rhode Island).

[558] I.P.H. William Raverel 9 July 1829 Peace Dale Letters (outgoing) v. 147, July 6, 1829 – November 20, 1837 I.P. Hazard, Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School, (Boston Massachusetts).

very best description of warranted goods."[559] The Hazards counted southern slaveholders as friends, not just business acquaintances.

The Hazard brothers expanded their operation in the 1830s. In 1832, they put in a new water wheel which the manager projected would turn out 50 yards per day.[560] In 1835 they entertained the idea of bartering some wool for a steam engine. A steam engine would more than double their production capabilities.[561] By the 1840s the Hazard were taking massive orders. In 1841 they shipped a Louisiana planter 464 "negro" summer suits.[562] The brothers stopped manufacturing negro cloth only when the equipment for doing so was destroyed in a fire 1855. They switched to producing shawls and cashmere, which they had been producing in small amounts since 1844. The Hazards probably did not try to reconstitute their negro cloth business because of the abundance of negro cloth mills in the state and the growing tension between northern manufacturers and southern planters. For over forty years the Hazards clothed southern slaves. However, negro cloth was much more than clothing; it was a symbol of slavery—a symbol manufactured in the North.

The Hazards of Rhode Island were indeed an intriguing family. This eighteenth century slaveholding family produced one of the most ardent abolitionists in Rhode Island—College Tom. College Tom in turn raised a son who manufactured negro cloth, and his grandsons turned the business into one of the most successful mills in the country.

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[559] I.P Hazard to O.J. Tyler and CO—Preston CT 30 July 1830 (South Kingston) Peace Dale Letters (outgoing) v. 147, July 6, 1829 – November 20, 1837 I.P. Hazard, Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School (Boston, Massachusetts).

[560] I.P.H. to Ros/Ron Habershana 3 January 1832 Peace Dale Letters (outgoing) v. 147, July 6, 1829 – November 20, 1837 I.P. Hazard, Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School (Boston, Massachusetts).

[561] George Hesworth to Issac Hazard 5 February 1835 (Boston) Mss 483 sg 12 Rhode Island Historical Society Library, (Providence Rhode Island).

[562] Oba, "Mostly Made, Especially For This Purpose, in Providence, RI," 38.

However, Rowland G. was at the very least ideologically conflicted about race-based slavery. While he supported the institution of slavery through the production of negro cloth, he objected to discrimination against African Americans—although that discrimination was grounded in race-based slavery. During his visits to New Orleans, 1833 to 1843, Rowland G. was instrumental in freeing blacks who had been unjustly detained in chain gangs. He provided witness that they were indeed free people. Rowland G. also helped a free black sailor escape unlawful enslavement in New Orleans. Furthermore, he gave an impassioned speech condemning the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law while he represented his town in the Rhode Island General Assembly.[563] Rowland G. Hazard was part of a long conflicted history in Rhode Island. During the antebellum era, some white Rhode Island were morally opposed to slavery, and they did not want slavery in their midst. However, the richest and most powerful among them, textile manufacturers, were perfectly comfortable with perpetuating the institution as long as it benefited them economically. In Rhode Island, the majority of the abolitionists were from the middle class, tradesmen and shopkeepers, while most of the anti-abolitionists were elites. For example, the wealthiest abolitionist owned $15,000 in real estate. On the other hand, seven anti-abolitionists in Providence were worth over $100,000. Furthermore, 30 of the 36 known anti-abolitionists in Providence were in the top ten percent of property owners.[564] In Rhode Island, the business community was motivated to support anti-

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[563] Robinson, *The Hazard Family*, 122. Oba, "Mostly Made, Especially For This Purpose, in Providence, RI," 1-2.

[564] Anti-abolitionists were afraid that if they gave in to the abolitionist they would also have to give into labor unions and a fair distribution of property. And they wanted above all else protect the ideals of public property. Secondly their businesses were predicated on making cloth for slave produced cotton. Finally, a move from negro cloth to finer goods was expensive because it required machinery and capital. However southern attempts to move slavery into the western territories pushed many businessmen over the edge. So while they dependent on slave grown cotton they opposed slavery's expansion. Ibid., 4.

abolitionists, because they feared the negative effects of southern boycotts of northern goods.

Conclusion: The Meaning of Clothing

An examination of the negro cloth industry exposes how northerners helped to sustain race-based slavery in the United States. It was northerners who made slave clothing. Negro cloth was a symbol of inferiority; it was a physical maker of race-based slavery. Negro cloth, though worn by slaves, was produced for the master class; it served their needs, not the needs of enslaved people. Frederick Douglass was one of the first people to write in depth about negro cloth. His narrative provides one the most detailed descriptions of antebellum slave clothing:

> Their yearly clothing consisted of two coarse linen shirts, one pair of linen trousers, like the shirts, one jacket, one pair of trousers for winter, made of coarse negro cloth, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes; the whole of which could not have cost more that seven dollars. The allowance of the slave children was given to their mother, or the old women having the care of them. The children unable to work in the field had neither shoes, stockings, jackets, nor trousers, given to them; their clothing consisted of two coarse linen shirts per year. When these failed them, they went naked until the next allowance-day. Children from seven to ten years old, of both sexes, almost naked, might be seen at all seasons of the year.[565]

Negro cloth was not just uncomfortable, but also sparingly allotted. The cloth was designed to be strong and durable. It was not designed to be comfortable or even complement the work enslaved people did. In fact, the scratchy nature of the material caused enslaved people further hardship. However, its durability was cost-effective for slaveholders.

Northern manufacturers of negro cloth were literally making class and race in antebellum America. The existence of negro cloth helped attach race to class, because negro cloth was made specifically for slaves. Slaves were the most debased class in

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[565] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave Written by Himself with an Introduction by Peter J. Gomes* (New York: Signet, 1997), 26.

society; furthermore, all slaves were of African descent. And if negro cloth was meant for people of African descent, most of whom were enslaved, then all other types of clothing was made for white people—independent, free people. Even the poorest whites did not wear negro cloth. Consequently, some southern slave codes dictated what enslaved people could and could not wear.[566]

Clothing also held meaning for enslaved people. Slaves bought, sold, bartered and traded clothes in an underground economy. Clothing was so valuable that runaways used it to finance their escapes. Slaves acquired "white clothing" in a number of ways. Some simply stole clothing from their masters. Others received clothes as gifts or hand-me-downs. Urban slaves, who often hired themselves out, bought fine clothing with their wages. Slave mistresses received "nice" clothes from their masters. Enslaved people created their own styles with the clothing they acquired; they did not simply mimic whites. They combined their clothing (homespun or negro cloth) with fine apparel in non-conventional combinations, creating their own sense of style. For example, during the antebellum era enslaved women used different colors of thread to make their clothing unique.[567] Slaves often put together bright and vivid colors, which those of European descent often saw as inappropriate. Furthermore, they paired the humblest of articles with the finest pieces of clothing.[568] Clothing was a vital part of slave culture. Even the most abused slave usually had a nice set of clothing to be worn on Sundays and holidays. The larger white southern population was conflicted about slave clothing. Many whites complained incessantly about slaves dressing above their station. However, many slaves

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[566] See Michael Zakim, Ready-Made Democracy: A History of Men's Dress in the American Republic, 1760-1860 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 2.

[567] Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Past and Present* no. 148 (Aug., 1995), 156-161 and 165-168.

[568] Ibid., 179-180.

received their fine clothes from their masters. The state of South Carolina went so far as to forbid slaves from wearing fine clothes; nevertheless, the master class did not care to adhere to or enforce the law.[569]

The negro cloth industry, like the Atlantic slave trade, inextricably connected the economies of the North and South. Northern producers of negro cloth not only brought their cotton from southern planters; they used that cotton to manufacture clothing for southern slaves. Rhode Island textile manufacturers found and exploited a niche in the textile industry—negro cloth production. Families such as the Hazards were ideally situated to take advantage of the market for negro cloth. They had both familial and business connections in the South. Their success inspired other Rhode Island entrepreneurs to try their hand at negro cloth production. Following the Civil War, negro cloth production in the Rhode Island decreased considerably from 79% of all textiles produced in 1850 to 40% in 1870.[570] The business of slavery, the negro cloth industry in particular, remained central to Rhode Island's economic and society well into the antebellum era.

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[569] Ibid.

[570] Negro cloth, in Rhode Island, was slowly replaced by fancy cassimere. See Stachiw, " 'For the Sake of Commerce': Rhode Island, Slavery and the Textile Industry."

CONCLUSION

SLAVERY, EMANCIPATION AND BLACK FREEDOM IN RHODE ISLAND, 1652-1842

The history of slavery in Rhode was fundamentally shaped by white Rhode Islanders involvements and investments in the businesses of slavery. The West Indian and Atlantic slave trades formed the foundation of the businesses of slavery in Rhode Island and also determined the racial practices, therefore racial ideologies, in the colonial period. Those racial ideologies served to limit emancipation and black freedom in the new nation. As a result, not only did the practice of slavery shape the lives of American Indians, blacks and whites, but so too did the businesses of slavery. Beginning in late seventeenth century, Rhode Islanders exported foodstuffs to West Indian planters in exchange for molasses and cash. Throughout the eighteenth century, Rhode Island slave traders sold slaves, which they purchased with rum, to colonists in the West Indies, the American South and New England. Finally, during the antebellum era, Rhode Island manufactures produced negro cloth, to clothe slaves on southern plantations.

An evaluation of disparate sources reveal Rhode Island's wide ranging participation in a local, regional, national and trans-Atlantic system that created tremendous wealth through dehumanizing people of African descent. Specifically, this project examines the black experience of slavery and freedom, and pays close attention to white investments, litigiousness, law making and abolitionism. The proceedings of the colonial Rhode Island General Assembly reveal when and how white Rhode Islanders wrote the practice of race-based slavery and racism into the law. Colonial court cases provide detailed information about slaveholders, their slaves and their neighborhoods (slaveholding and non-slaveholding). Runaway advertisements and black military records illuminate how blacks challenged slavery during the revolutionary period. Quakers manumission records explain the moral convictions behind the political actions of white

abolitionists, during the 1770s and 1780s. Providence Town records, from 1780s-1820s, reveal the difficulties freed blacks faced in trying to escape poverty, while the meeting minutes of black mutual aid and benevolent societies highlight the agency and creativity of a people striving to create and sustain a free community. Finally, the business correspondence between the owners of Rhode Island's most successful negro cloth factory, draw attention to the economic and social relationships between northern industrialists and southern plantation owners in the antebellum period.

White Rhode Islanders committed to both race-based slavery and the businesses of slavery during the colonial period; they remained committed to the businesses of slavery through the antebellum era. In light of black resistance to slavery however, and under pressure from white abolitionists, they began to distance themselves from slaveholding during the revolutionary era, although they remained explicitly racist. White Rhode Islanders shifted from American Indian to African slaves as native people were increasing characterized as unfit colonial residents, and as Rhode Islanders had greater access to African slaves through their involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. During the revolutionary period, enslaved blacks undermined white mastery through flight, military service and bargaining for freedom. Simultaneously, local white abolitionists successfully pushed for a gradual emancipation law. Gradual emancipation allowed for the control of a generation of African Americans, but it also put an expiration date on mastery. Freed blacks found themselves caught somewhere between slavery and freedom. Therefore, the history of Rhode Island is fundamentally incomplete without a full analysis of slavery, the process of emancipation and the efforts to define and defend black freedom within context of white Rhode Islanders investments in businesses of slavery.

White Rhode Islanders had multiple ties to the institution of slavery; consequently, they benefited from slavery in variety of ways. Many Rhode Islanders owned slaves and even more owed their livelihoods to Atlantic commerce. Most obviously, Rhode Islanders were connected to the institution of slavery through

slaveholding. By 1750, they held the highest proportion of slaves in New England; only New Yorkers held a higher percentage of bonded people in the North. Rhode Islanders also invested in the institution of slavery in less visible, but essential ways. Rhode Island farmers raised and grew foods stuffs (dairy products, meat and vegetables) for the slave populations in the West Indies. Rhode Island tradesmen built ships and barrels to transport the goods. Rhode Island merchants were responsible for shipping these basic necessities and bringing back cash, and more important, molasses. Rhode Island distillers used West Indian molasses to make rum, which local merchants used to barter for goods from other colonies and, slave traders used to purchase slaves along the African coast. In the antebellum era, Rhode Islanders extended their ties to black bondage by devoting the vast majority of their textile mills to the production of "negro cloth." It is important to note that many of the most successful farmers, merchants, slave traders and manufacturers were town council men, assemblymen, justices and governors. This meant that from the colonial period through the antebellum era, white Rhode Islanders were socially, politically, and economically depended upon and invested in the businesses of slavery.

Merchants and slave traders wrote racial practice, and therefore racial ideology into law. They contributed to an evolving ideology of race that naturalized the enslavement of non-whites. For American Indians, white Rhode Islanders economic success, therefore permanence, resulted in violent conflicts. Consequently, as Rhode Island became a permanent settlement, American Indians were first enslaved and then expelled from colonial towns. In comparison, as white Rhode Islanders became increasingly involved in the Atlantic slave trade, the number of blacks brought to Rhode Island increased exponentially. By the end of the first decade of the eighteenth century, all blacks (enslaved or free) in Rhode Island were assumed dependents if enslaved or, likely criminals if freed. Race-based slavery, developed in the colonial period, required the debasement of all black people.

The ideology of black inferiority also perverted the emancipation process and restricted black freedom. Although, most black Rhode Islanders were free by 1790, they were still a dependent people. The emancipation process, initiated by black resistance and written into law by abolitionists Quakers, impoverished freed people. Most blacks began their lives in freedom with little to no resources. Runaways took only what they could carry, manumitted black soldiers were paid in depreciated continental currency, and those who were manumitted privately or by the state received nothing but their freedom. Consequently, the black community turned inward. They established independent black institutions that provided them with the support they needed, including, dependent support, schools and space to air grievances.

The history of slavery in Rhode Island reveals the how the institution of slavery (slaveholding and the businesses of slavery) influenced the economy, politics and social structures of a northern colony and state. Slavery flourished on the plantations of the Narragansett, and in the port cities of Newport and Providence. Moreover, the businesses of slavery transformed those towns and cities into economic success stories. The study of slavery in Rhode Island allows for important new insights into northern slavery. This includes how white Rhode Islanders' deep economic and personal connections to the institution slavery shaped slavery, and restricted emancipation and black freedom. Furthermore, these connections influenced the creation of the local racial ideology of white supremacy in Rhode Island. This dissertation complicates understandings of the institution of slavery in the North by revealing how Rhode Island was an integral part of the institution of slavery in the Americas. Moreover, white Rhode Islanders' commitment to the businesses of slavery shaped black life, in slavery and freedom. This case study points to the need for a conceptualization of North American slavery that integrates northern practices and investments in a trans-Atlantic world by exposing how northerners were intimately involved in the maintenance of the system of slavery in the Americas.

The history of the origins of slavery and emancipation in North America remain incomplete without careful case studies of northern colonies and states.

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