Rhode Island and the Slave Trade

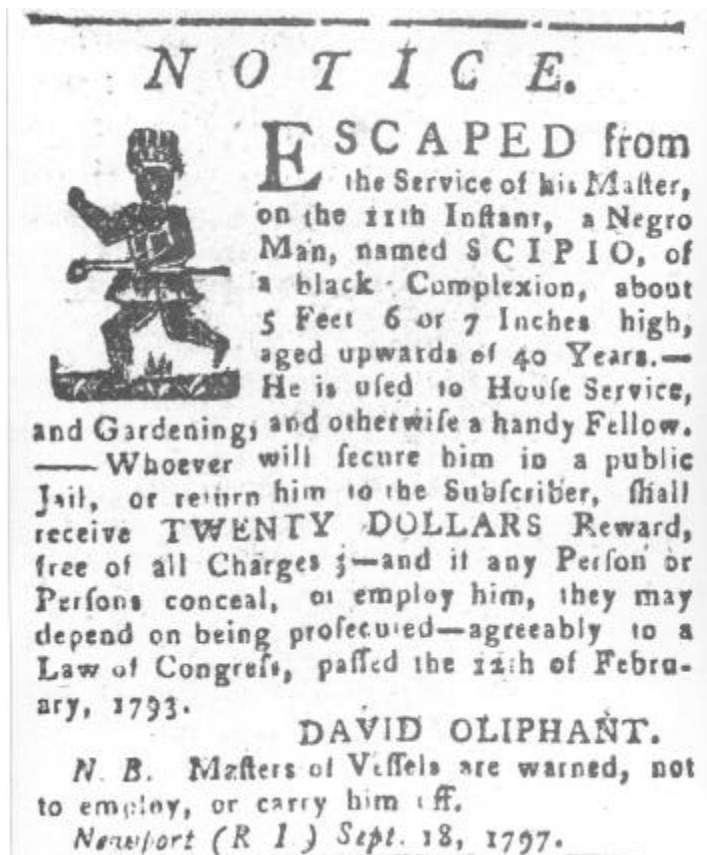By J. Stanley Lemons*

One must be cautious about reading present-day morality and attitudes back into the past. Today we are horrified by slavery, but until the mid-eighteenth century slavery was generally accepted in all societies and in all times. When we see seventeenth-century figure like Roger Williams involved in the distribution and sale of Narragansett captives after King Philip's War, we should remember that he was doing something that was acceptable in that age. Even those being enslaved expected it to happen; they were the losers in a war, and that was what happened to losers. But Williams was also opposed to "man stealing," or abducting people in order to enslave them, and he even spoke against holding war captives as "perpetual slaves."[1]

Left: Advertisement in the Newport Mercury 18 September 1797. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 7543)

Massachusetts Bay adopted a law establishing permanent slavery for whites, Native Americans, and Africans in 1641, becoming the first British colony in America to do so. This became the law for Plymouth and Connecticut as well when the United Colonies was formed in 1643. Under Williams's leadership, Providence Plantations — Providence and Warwick—responded in 1652 by passing legislation that sought to prevent the development of slavery by limiting the time that anyone could be held in bondage. The legal condition of such unfree people was to be like that of indentured servants: their servitude was to be limited and not inherited.[2] But the new law fell into disuse after Providence and Warwick failed to persuade the colony's other two towns, Portsmouth and Newport, to accept the legislation.

As Williams's scruples about slavery suggest, certain restrictions on enslavement had developed over time. For example, Christians were not supposed to enslave Christians, nor were Muslims to enslave Muslims. There was, however, no prohibition on Muslims enslaving Christians or vice versa, or on either of them enslaving pagans or infidels.[3] The enslavement of pagan Slavic people went on for so long that the very word slave is derived from the proper name Slav.

The conviction that slavery was simply and completely wrong was slow to occur. The first antislavery protest that we know about in American history came from the Quakers of Germantown, Pennsylvania, in 1688. At that time Quakers were regarded as extreme, even weird, and were despised by nearly everyone else.[4] One might recall that Massachusetts hanged four Quakers in the 1660s, and that Roger Williams himself considered Quakers heretics.[5]

Opposition to slavery began to grow in the century that followed. Those who lived in the second half of the eighteenth century were on the cusp of the change from regarding slavery as ordinary and acceptable to regarding it as immoral and unacceptable. The generation of the Founding Fathers wrestled with the issue.[6] The question of slavery and the slave trade became increasingly a matter of moral concern for many people in the years before the American Revolution. Struggling to eliminate slavery within their own ranks, the Quakers began trying to convince others of its immorality as well. The thrust of Enlightenment humanitarianism added weight to the cause among many who were untouched by Quaker morality. As Joanne Pope Melish notes in her book *Disowning Slavery*, "it was only in the context of the Revolution that the antislavery movement gained support outside a fringe group of Quakers and other agitators."[7]

By the early 1770s the impact of these moral concerns became evident as various prominent people began to purge themselves of any involvement in the institution of slavery. James Manning, Brown University's first president and pastor of Providence's First Baptist Church, freed his only slave in December 1770. Former slaveholder Samuel Hopkins, pastor of the First Congregational Church in Newport, began preaching against slavery in 1771, and he was soon joined by Ezra Stiles, pastor of Newport's Second Congregational Church and a future president of Yale. Moses Brown converted to Quakerism and freed his ten slaves in 1773, the same year in which the Quaker Yearly Meeting voted a complete break with slavery and ordered Friends to free all of their slaves.[8]

In June 1774 the growing movement against slavery led the Rhode Island General Assembly to pass a law prohibiting the further importation of slaves into Rhode Island. This was followed by the state's gradual emancipation act of 1784, which provided that from then on, children born to slave mothers were to be considered freeborn citizens. However, to compensate owners for their losses, such children were to be bound out as apprentices until age twenty-one, and their wages paid to their mothers' owners.

Then, in 1787, the General Assembly made it illegal for any Rhode Islander to be involved in the African slave trade anywhere. This last law is noteworthy in that it was the first law in America prohibiting American citizens from involvement in the African slave trade. In 1788 Moses Brown and Samuel Hopkins convinced both Massachusetts and Connecticut to enact laws almost identical to Rhode Island's, thereby outlawing the African slave trade for nearly all New Englanders.

But when these laws went unenforced, in February 1789 Moses Brown, Samuel Hopkins, James Manning, former congressman David Howell, New Bedford whaling magnate William Rotch, Thomas Robinson, Rowland and Thomas Hazard (the latter three from South County families that once owned large numbers of slaves), and about 180 other men, mostly Quakers, organized the Abolition Society (formally, 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). The Abolition Society became the self-appointed agency to enforce the laws against the slave trade, and it was this group that prosecuted John Brown, Moses's brother, in 1790 and 1797.

Nationally, the antislavery movement led to debates in the Continental Congress, the Confederation Congress, and the Constitutional Convention, and in 1787 it produced the Northwest Ordinance, which prohibited slavery in the northwest territories of the United States. It also caused George Washington to change his mind about slavery and tp provide for the freeing of his slaves after his death. Washington was the only one of the slaveholding Founding Fathers who made legal arrangements for the freedom of all of his slaves.[10]

In response to a rising outcry, Congress passed its first law against the African slave trade in 1794 and outlawed it completely in 1808. To put more teeth into the law, in 1820 Congress added the death penalty for participating in African slave trading. But hese laws were poorly enforced, and the British, who had been more heavily involved in the trade, did more to end it than the Americans did. Only one man was ever executed under the American law, — Capt. Nathaniel Gordon, a slaver from Portland, Maine, who was captured in 1860 and executed in 1862, during the Civil War. What makes Rhode Island's role in the African slave trade especially reprehensible is that much of it

took place after the African slave trade had been made illegal, first by Rhode Island and then by the United States governments.

Jay Coughtry, in *The Notorious Triangle* argues that American slave trade from 1727 to 1807 might be better called the Rhode Island slave trade. Throughout he eighteenth century, Rhode Island merchants controlled between 60 and 90 percent of American trade in African slaves.[11] But Rhode island's participation in the slave trade needs to be put in to context: compared to the part played by major slavers — Great Britain, Portugal, and France — America's role in the African slave trade was, says Coughtry, "minute." Rhode Islanders transported about 106,000 slaves during a period when Great Britain transported an estimated 2.5 million; that is, for every slave carried by Rhode Island slavers, Great Britain carried twenty-four.[12] Portugal, having started earlier and persisting longer, over time brought over even more slaves from Africa than Britain did. [13]

The first recorded visit of a slave trader to Rhode Island came in 1696, when a Boston-owned ship, the *Seaflower*, arrived at Newport with a cargo of forty-seven slaves and sold fourteen of them. The first recorded slaving voyages from Rhode Island occurred in 1700, when two sloops and a ship from Newport went to Africa and brought slaves to Barbados.[14] Newport remained Rhode Island's leading slave-trading town until the Revolution. During the war the slave trade was suspended, but it resumed in the frantic search for markets in the 1780s. From 1790 until the trade finally ended, Bristol was the state's chief slaving port; by 1807 Bristol merchants owned two of every three Rhode Island slaving ships.[15]

The first slaver from Providence sailed in January 1736 under Captain James Brown, the father of the four Brown brothers.[16] It was not a losing voyage, but James Brown never did it again. The next Brown slaver, *The Wheel of Fortune*, was dispatched in 1759 by Obadiah Brown, the uncle and mentor of the Brown brothers. It had the misfortune to be captured by a French raider and was lost. That was the one and only attempt at slave trading by Obadiah, who died in 1763.[17]

The loss of *The Wheel of Fortune* exemplified one of the reasons why slave trading fell off in the 1740s and from the late 1750s to 1764. As Great Britain and France engaged in their great wars for empire, Rhode Island merchants who had been active in the slave trade largely turned their efforts to privateering instead. For some merchants, privateering seems to have been the wartime equivalent of slaving. From the start of Queen Anne's War in 1702 to the beginning of the American Revolution, Rhode Island authorized nearly 180 privateers to raid enemy shipping. During King George's War (1739¬1748) the colony issued commissions to 35 Newport privateers, and a third of Newport's adult males, including slaves, served on the privateers at one time or another.[18] Privateering flourished once again during the French and Indian War (1754-1763).[19] But privateering, like slave trading, was a risky enterprise, and only a minority of Rhode Island merchants ever engaged in either.[20]

The next time the Browns attempted a slaving expedition was in 1764. In November of that year the brig *Sally*, financed by Moses, Joseph, Nicholas, and John Brown, departed for Africa with merchandise and stores worth $14,000. The voyage was an unqualified disaster, losing the brothers between $9,000 and $12,000. Moses, Joseph, and Nicholas were never again involved in the African slave trade.[21] John, on the other hand, continued in the trade or defended it "almost to his dying day" in 1803.[22]

Actually, John did not get many more chances to engage in the slave trade. He sent another ship to the Slave Coast in 1769, but the Revolution cut off the trade from 1775 to 1783. He did not dispatch slavers again until 1785 and 1786, when the disruption of prewar trade routes and a postwar depression left him and other merchants in desperate straits. By then John Brown and his younger brother Moses were on opposite sides of the slavery issue. Nevertheless, by 1787 John needed Moses's financial support for his China-trade ventures, and he promised not to engage in slaving again.[23] It was in that year, 1787, that the Rhode Island General Assembly banned participation by Rhode Islanders in the African slave trade.

The organization of the Abolition Society in 1789, founded to enforce the Assembly's 1787 law, provoked proponents of the trade to mount a vigorous attempt to justify it. John Brown opened the attack on 14 February

1789 with a letter in the *Providence Gazette*, declaring that the new society was trying to ruin solid citizens and gentlemen, and that it threatened the social order and honest commerce. Playing on negative stereotypes of Quakers, the letter was aimed at discrediting the Abolition Society (especially its still suspect Quaker membership) and intimidating supporters of the antislavery movement. John's defense of slavery and his attack on those who opposed it led to a debate with Moses via letters to the local press during the early months of 1789.[24]

In 1790 the Abolition Society initiated a suit against John Brown for forcing one of his slaves to board a ship that appeared to be a slaver. In exchange for the society's dropping the suit, John grudgingly agreed to free the slave.[25] Outraged at being deprived, as he said, of the benefit of his slave, and unable to strike back directly at the Abolition Society, he resigned from the Charitable Baptist Society, an organization whose ranks included such prominent Abolition Society members as Brown president James Manning, former congressman David Howell, and Governor Arthur Fenner.[26]

Then, in 1795, John went back on his word to Moses by sending his ship *Hope* on a slaving voyage to Africa. The Abolition Society brought another suit against him, and in March 1797 he was prosecuted under the 1794 United States statute. His ship was condemned and forfeited. Although he whined about being singled out for prosecution, he was not the only one pursued by the Abolition Society. Cyprian Sterry, who dispatched more slavers in 1795 and 1796 than any other Providence merchant, was also charged by the society. However, he struck a bargain: he promised to get out of the trade if the society dropped the case. That was done, and "his name never again appeared on an African ship register or cargo manifest."[27] John Brown refused to put a similar pledge in writing, so the Abolition Society pressed its case against him.

John Brown defended the slave trade to the end. In 1800 he was one of five U.S. congressmen to vote against a bill to strengthen the 1794 law under which he had been prosecuted. Speaking against the bill, he offered three arguments: First, he said that it was wrong to deny to American citizens the benefits of a trade that was open to Europeans. Second, he maintained that the trade was not immoral because the condition of those enslaved was "much bettered"; as war captives in Africa, he said, they would probably have been put to death had they not been sold into slavery. Finally, he argued that the trade would bring much-desired revenue to the nation's treasury. "Why should a heavy fine and imprisonment be made the penalty for carrying on a trade so advantageous?" he asked.[28]

John Brown's prominence has led some to believe that the wealth of the Brown family was based on the slave trade. The historian Lorenzo Greene, for example, writes:

> The Brown family was one of the greatest mercantile families in colonial America. At least six of them, James, his brother, Obadiah, and James' four sons: Nicholas, John, Joseph, and Moses, carried on one of the biggest slave-trading businesses in New England. For over fifty years this powerful family reaped large rewards from the slave trade. When James Brown sent the *Mary* to Africa in 1736, he launched Providence into the Negro traffic and laid the foundation for the Brown fortune. From this year until 1790, the Browns played a commanding role in the New England slave trade.[29]

This is admittedly an old source, dating from 1942, but the view lingers. More recent scholarship has presented a different view. It has been pointed out, for instance, that the foundation for the Brown fortune was laid by trade in goods in the Caribbean.[30] Further, the Browns attempted only three slaving voyages from 1736 to 1765; one was a modest success, one was lost totally, and the third resulted in a loss of more than $9,000. Moses, Joseph, and Nicholas had nothing more to do with slave trading after 1765, building their fortunes instead on manufacturing, banking, insurance, land speculation, and other businesses. As James Hedges puts it, after 1765 "the Browns had become manufacturers first and merchants second.[31] Only John persisted, but he sent only four more ships over the course of the next twenty-six years.

On the other hand, no one disputes that the fortune of the DeWolf family of Bristol was based on rum, slaving, privateering, and, perhaps, piracy. "In the annals of the American slave trade," Jay Coughtry concludes, "the

D'Wolfs are without peers. ... theirs was one of the few fortunes that truly rested on rum and slaves.[32] Over the years the DeWolfs launched twice as many slaving voyages as their nearest competitors. The career of the notorious George DeWolf (who built Linden Place in Bristol in 1810) did not end until 1825, during which time he was engaged in the totally illegal enterprises of slave trading and privateering for a foreign government.[33] The DeWolfs and other slavers aggressively challenged the limitations on the slave trade, and DeWolf henchmen thwarted efforts to enforce the laws. Strongarm tactics sabotaged the auction of the condemned DeWolf vessel *Lucy* in 1799 and ended effective enforcement of the confiscation provision of the 1794 law.[34] When a separate U.S. customs district was subsequently created for Bristol in 1801, the customs agent was Charles Collins, the former captain of the *Lucy* and the brother-in-law of James DeWolf. Collins never managed to see a slaver during the twenty years he held the office.[35]

The history of the DeWolfs notwithstanding, it should be emphasized that the slave trade was never more than a marginal enterprise for most Rhode Island merchants, nor was it the basis of Rhode Island fortunes. Slaving voyages in the eighteenth century constituted only 3 to 10 percent of ship clearances in Rhode Island each year; rarely did any merchant devote more than a tenth of his voyages to slaving. Although many prominent merchant names were associated with the trade at one time or another, this involvement was merely one part of a larger complex pattern of oceanic enterprise.[36]

Rhode Island's involvement in the slave trade was part of a scramble by merchants to find something to trade and to market. The problem was that Rhode Island itself — a small place with no significant minerals or other raw materials to export — had little that anyone wanted. The essence of Rhode Island's oceanic commerce thus lay in re-exporting goods — in carrying things from one place to another and trading, trading, and trading, trying to make a profit on each transaction. The lack of exportable or salable goods is what led Rhode Islanders into the dubious, illegal, and immoral worlds of slave trading, smuggling, privateering, trading with the enemy in wartime, and piracy. So wide-spread was Rhode Island's evasion of the Navigation Acts that in 1764 Governor Stephen Hopkins admitted that 82 percent of the molasses brought into the colony was illegally imported.[37] It was the British attempt to stop that sort of customs evasion that led to the presence in Rhode Island waters of ships such as the HMS *Gaspee*.

Molasses has been described as the engine of Rhode Island's eighteenth-century commerce, and commentators often point to the fact that Newport and Providence teemed with rum distilleries. As something "re-exported," rum did, in fact, become Rhode Island's main export; that is, molasses was imported and re-exported as rum. But the often-made assumption that this production was all for the slave trade is erroneous. The truth is that only about a tenth of the rum was manufactured for the slave trade; Rhode Islanders themselves drank 48 percent of what was produced.[38] Most of the rest was sold to North American buyers from Nova Scotia to Georgia. The demand for rum by other buyers actually made it difficult for Rhode Island slavers to get enough rum for trading on the African coast. Needing about nine thousand gallons for a voyage, many had to buy it from other ports.[39]

Slaving was little more than a break-even proposition for most merchants. The great majority of Rhode Island vessels were engaged in the coastal trade with other continental colonies. This trade included, among other things, the gathering of goods that could be sold in the West Indies, a commerce that yielded (as Coughtry notes) "a small, but almost certain profit."[40] The return in such trade was less than what could be earned in slaving, but one could make two or three such voyages with less risk and expense than were entailed in a single slaving expedition.[41] For merchants with small capital and less tolerance for risk — as most merchants were — these were major advantages.

At the same time, since an idle ship earned nothing and still cost money to berth and maintain, most merchants wanted to keep as many of their ships as possible in play, and this meant that they had to diversify their risks and voyages. Aaron Lopez, reputed to be the richest merchant in Newport on the eve of the Revolution, employed his ships in a variety of trading enterprises, but not all were equally profitable. Although he was probably the major slave trader in the colony's principal slave-trading town, he sent fewer than 10 percent of his voyages to the

African coast, and he apparently did no better than break even in the trade.[42] "The slave trade played a variety of roles in the merchants' affairs," Sarah Deutsch concludes, "but fortune making was not among them."[43]

Newport's halcyon days ended with the Revolution, and the town never regained its prominence. Providence, which had been only a minor participant in the slave trade, had begun to turn to manufacturing even before the Revolution, and it soon left oceanic commerce behind. By 1790 it was Bristol, a small player in the trade before the Revolution, that emerged as the leading slave-trading town in the state. Rather than following Providence's lead into manufacturing, Bristol became so economically dependent on the sundry ventures of George DeWolf that when DeWolf's empire collapsed in 1825, so too did Bristol's economy. Unable to wean themselves from the sea, Bristolians turned to whaling, but the development of gaslights in the 1840s and, later, of kerosene destroyed the demand for whale oil.

In an examination of Rhode Island's involvement in the African slave trade, certain points stand out. First, although the American role in the trade was a minor one, Rhode Islanders were the supermajority players in that role. Second, the slave trade was only a marginal part of the larger world of oceanic commerce for Rhode Island merchants; it was not their central enterprise. Third, among efforts to end the African slave trade, other Rhode Islanders took the lead; the first American law against the trade was in fact passed in Rhode Island in 1787. The pity and shame was that this law was not effective, and for a time the slavers became more energetic than ever.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Unquestionably the best book about Rhode Island and the slave trade is Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle*. Coughtry mined the United States Customs House records for Rhode Island and was able to compile a list of 934 voyages in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which are listed in an appendix. Among other things, the entries provide the names of the ships, the owners, the captains, and the numbers of slaves taken.

To be clear about the Brown family's involvement in the trade, one must also consult James Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: The Colonial Years*, which was based on Hedges's intensive study of the Brown family papers. One problem that might arise from using Coughtry's list by itself is the mistaken conclusion that all the Browns that appear there were members of the same Brown family. Hedges will correct such a misapprehension.

Mack Thompson, *Moses Brown: Reluctant Reformer*, provides additional detail about the Brown family, and especially about Moses's efforts to end the slave trade and to aid his own former slaves for many years after emancipation. Stanley Chyet, *Lopez of Newport: Colonial American Merchant Prince*, devotes considerable attention to Aaron Lopez's entry and participation in the slave trade after 1762. That the trade was marginal to the Newport economy is the common conclusion drawn by Chyet as well as by Sarah Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen: Newport Slavers, 1735-1774," *New England Quarterly* 55 (June 1982), and Virgina Bever Platt, "'And Don't Forget the Guinea Voyage': The Slave Trade of Aaron Lopez of Newport," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 32 (1975).

The history of Bristol has drawn far less scholarship than that of either Providence or Newport. The saga of the illegal slaving, unlawful privateering, and piracy of the DeWolfs is best told by George Howe in *Mount Hope: A New England Chronicle*. The account is somewhat anecdotal, but Howe explains that most of the unsavory records of the DeWolfs were burned, buried, or lost.

 Notes:

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1. See Roger Williams's letter to John Winthrop, 3 July 1637, in *The Correspondence of Roger Williams*, ed. Glenn LaFantasie (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1988), 1:109.

2. The law "ordered that no blacke mankind or white [be] forced by convenant bond, or otherwise, to serve any man ... longer than ten yeares.... At the end of the term of ten yeares [the owners of slaves were] to sett them free, as the manner is with the English servants." John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England,* 10 vols. (Providence: A. C. Greene, 1856-63), 1:243. Slaves under the age of fourteen were to be freed at age twenty-four. Slaveholders who refused to emancipate their slaves or sought to sell them away were to be fined.

3. Islamic slavers carried away so many Africans over the centuries that it took the Europeans until the nineteenth century to equal, and finally surpass, the numbers enslaved by Muslims. See Paul E. Lovejoy, *The Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), table 2.1, page 26; table 3.1, page 47; table 3.7, page 62. These tables show that Islamic slave traders took approximately 7,020,000 slaves from 650 to 1800, and that European slavers carried away about 6,090,000 by 1800. Interestingly, about 45 percent of African slaves were exported, while the other 55 percent were kept enslaved in Africa. *Ibid.*, 65.

4. Seeing the quiet and dignified face of the Friends today, we tend to forget why they came to be called Quakers. When the movement began in the mid-seventeenth century, some adherents expressed their religion in ecstatic and frenzied ways, even to disrupting the meetings of other religious groups by bursting into them naked.

5. See Edwin S. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America* (Valley Forge, Pa: Judson Press, 1999), 176-88.

6. An example of the transition can be seen in the family of John Adams's wife, Abigail Smith. Although she grew up in a family with slaves (her father had two black slaves, who were freed in his will), she was as adamantly opposed to slavery as John himself, whose family owned no slaves. See David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 26, 56, 104, 292.

7. Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 50.

8. Arline Ruth Kiven, *Then Why the Negroes: The Nature and Course of the Anti-Slavery Movement in Rhode Island, 1637-1861* (Providence: Urban League of Rhode Island, 1973), 21. Joanne Pope Melish's *Disowning Slavery* shows how difficult it was for the Quakers to eradicate slavery in their own ranks, and how siaveholding dragged on among Quakers for years. Stephen Hopkins, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and governor of Rhode Island, was disfellowshipped by his Quaker meeting for failing to free all his slaves.

9. Christy Millard Nadalin, "The Last Years of the Rhode Island Slave Trade," *Rhode Island History* 54 (1996): 45. See also Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 206.

10. See Kenneth Morgan, "George Washington and the Problem of Slavery," *Journal of American Studies* 34 (August 2000): 301.

11. Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle*, 25.

12. *Ibid*., 6. Coughtry tallied 934 voyages, carrying 106,000 slaves; *ibid*., 241-85. The recently released Harvard data base suggests "that the Rhode Island trade amounted to about 1,000 voyages, that Rhode Island ports sent out about half of all slave vessels from the North American mainland." David Eltis et al., "The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 58 (2001): 22.

13. Portugal (45.9 percent), Great Britain (28.1 percent), and France (13.2 percent) together accounted for 87.2 percent of the slave trade. Eltis et al., "Transatlantic Slave Trade," table 1, p. 43.

14. Bartlett, *Records*, 4:54-55.

15. Coughtry*, Notorious Triangle*, 6.

16. The Browns' participation in the African slave trade is recounted in James Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: The Colonial Years* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 70-85.

17. *Ibid*., 72.

18. Sarah Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen: Newport Slavers, 1735-1774," *New England Quarterly* 55 (June 1982): 243. Richard Partridge, Rhode Island's agent in London, reported to the King of England in 1757 that Rhode Island had fitted out more privateers than any other of the northern colonies during King George's War. See Robert W. Kenny, "Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam," *Rhode Island History* 36 (1977): 110.

19. Rhode Island merchants also traded with the enemy during the French and Indian War, a conflict that had a devastating effect on the colony's commerce. Newport merchants lost over a hundred vessels to French raiders and to British enforcers trying to stop the illicit trade. Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen," 246.

20. "To [the merchants]," Deutsch concludes, "the slave trade simply provided an alternative set of markets and carried risks and opportunities similar to those of privateering. Potential losses outweighed potential grains for most merchants." *Ibid*., 253.

21. Moses's abandonment of the slave trade was clearly a matter of conscience; he had had a religious conversion and become a Quaker. Because neither Nicholas nor Joseph ever spoke out against the trade, one might wonder if they simply saw it as bad business.

22. Hedges, *Browns of Providence Plantations*, 81. One must observe that John Brown's participation in, and advocacy of, the slave trade did little to diminish his standing in Rhode Island. Slaving was a marginal activity to him, and he had many, many other much more profitable enterprises. He was regarded as a great patriot, a friend of George Washington, and a community leader; his election to the Confederation Congress (1784-85) and the United States Congress (1799-1801) was a mark of that esteem.

23. Mack Thompson, *Moses Brown: Reluctant Reformer* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 191.

24. *Ibid*., 196-99; Nadalin, "Last Years," 41-43.

25. Thompson, *Moses Brown*, 200-201.

26. J. Stanley Lemons, *First: The History of the First Baptist Church in America* (Providence: Charitable Baptist Society, 2001), 27-28.

27. Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle*, 214.

28. Hedges, *Browns of Providence Plantations*, 84.

29. Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (1942; reprint, New York: Atheneum, 1968), 30 n. 87.

30. Hedges, *Browns of Providence Plantations*, 21-46.

31. *Ibid*., 123. They went into the iron business in 1765 and were the premier manufacturer of spermaceti candles from 1768 to 1777. Moses Brown's interest in textile manufacturing eventually led to the establishment of Slater Mill.

32. Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle,* 48.

33. George Howe, *Mount Hope: A New England Chronicle* (New York: Viking Press, 1959), 204.

34. William Ellery, the U.S. customs agent in Newport, brought the suit against the *Lucy* and sought to have it bought by the government at public auction for use as a revenue cutter. This plan was thwarted when his assistant, Samuel Bosworth, was seized by "Indians" and prevented from attending the auction. There the *Lucy* was purchased at a low price by a Cuban captain in the employ of the DeWolfs and sailed away under the Cuban flag to rejoin the DeWolf operations. See Howe, *Mount Hope*, 107-8; William M. Fowler, *William Ellery: A Rhode Island Politico and Lord of Admiralty* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1973), 175-76.

35. See Howe, *Mount Hope*, 107-9; Nadalin, "Last Years," 46-47; Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle*, 217-18, 225-29.

36. See Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen," 229¬53. Deutsch notes that "Only a quarter of Newport's leading merchants ever succumbed to the seduction of [the slave trade]." *Ibid*., 253. See also Hedges, *Browns of Providence Plantations*, 22. After examining the involvement of Aaron Lopez, said to be the most important Newporter in the slave trade in the decade before the American Revolution, Virginia Bever Platt concludes that "the triangular trade ... was not a major factor in the commerce of colonial New England." Virginia Bever Platt," 'And Don't Forget the Guinea Voyage': The Slave Trade of Aaron Lopez of Newport," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 32 (1975), 618.

37. The Rhode Island Remonstrance of 1764, penned by Stephen Hopkins, stated that only 2,500 gallons of the 14,000 gallons of molasses imported the previous year came from British sources. See Bartlett, *Records*, 6:381.

38. Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle*, 15; Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen," 231.

39. Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen," 238; see also Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle*, 88-89.

40. Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle*, 19. See also Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen," 236.

41. While the potential return on a slaving voyage was higher, the chances of losing the vessel were also higher, the insurance was more costly, and the officers and crew (not to speak of the slaves themselves) were more subject to deadly disease.

42. Between 1760 and 1776 Lopez sent fourteen ships to Africa for slaves, but he barely broke even for the effort. At the same time he dispatched nearly two hundred voyages in the rest of his trade and reaped a fortune. See Platt, "And Don't Forget the Guinea Voyage,'" 601-18. Platt finds that "there is strong evidence that less than half of [Lopez's slaving voyages], and possibly only a total of four, turned a profit," and that the slave trade "was not on the whole a profitable part of [the] business" of Lopez and his father-in-law and business associate, Jacob Rodriguez Rivera. *Ibid*., 616, 617. See also Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen," 248.

43. Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen," 249.