Rhode Island Slavery and the University
Jennifer Betts, University Archivist, Brown University
Society of American Archivists, NOLA 2013
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 2001</td>
<td>David Horowitz’s “Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea and Racist Too”</td>
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<td>July 2001</td>
<td>President Ruth Simmons sworn in</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Lawsuit against corporations mentioned Harvard, Yale, and Brown benefitted from slavery</td>
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March 2004  Unearthing the past: Brown University, the Brown Family, and the Rhode Island Slave Trade symposium

April 2004  “Slavery and justice: We seek to discover the meaning of our past” op ed

Charge to the committee
Members: 11 faculty 1 graduate student
       2 administrators 3 undergraduate students

Goal and charge:
• Provide factual information and critical perspectives that will deepen understanding.
• Organize academic events and activities that might help the nation and the Brown community think deeply, seriously, and rigorously about the questions raised by this controversy.
Rhode Island and Slavery

• Between 1725 and 1807 more than 900 ships from Rhode Island travelled to West Africa

• Ships owned by Rhode Island merchants accounted for 60% of slave trade voyages in 18th and early 19th century

• Rhode Island ships transported 106,000 slaves
Brown Family Tree

James Brown (1698-1739)
  - Obadiah Brown (1712-1762) (brothers)
  - Nicholas Brown, Sr. (1729-1791)
    - Joseph Brown (1733-1785)
      - John Brown (1736-1803)
        - Moses Brown (1738-1836)
  - Nicholas Brown, Jr. (1769–1841)
Brown Family Tree

James Brown (1698-1739)

Obadiah Brown (1712-1762)

Nicholas Brown, Sr. (1729-1791)

Joseph Brown (1733-1785)

John Brown (1736-1803)

Moses Brown (1738-1836)

Nicholas Brown, Jr. (1769–1841)

- First record of slave trading in 1736
- *Mary* left for Africa
- Obadiah sold slaves in West Indies
- Three slaves sold in Providence by James for 120 pounds
Brown Family Tree

James Brown (1698-1739)

Obadiah Brown (1712-1762)
- Brothers

Nicholas Brown, Sr. (1729-1791)

Joseph Brown (1733-1785)
- Sally, 1764-65: 109 of 196 slaves died from revolt, disease, suicide, and starvation

John Brown (1736-1803)
- Captain Esek Hopkins:
  - First commander in chief of US Navy during Revolutionary War.
  - State legislator
  - Brother of Stephen Hopkins

Moses Brown (1738-1836)
- Strong supporter of College of Rhode Island
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Brown Family</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>University</th>
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<tr>
<td>Slave ship <em>Sally</em> sails</td>
<td>1764</td>
<td>College of Rhode Island founded</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1770</td>
<td>College Edifice built</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moses converts to Quakerism</td>
<td>1773</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses founds Providence Abolition Society</td>
<td>1789</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>John acquitted of illegal slave trading</td>
<td>1796</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas, Jr. donates $5,000 to College of Rhode Island</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Name changes to Brown University</td>
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University and Slavery

• James Manning owned a slave (freed in 1770)
• 30 members of Corporation owned or captained slave ships
• Lopez and Rivera donated wood to build College Edifice (one of the largest slave trading firms in Newport)
• Hezekiah Smith raised 3,700 Carolina pounds ($50,000) in South Carolina during 1760s
Building of College Edifice (University Hall), 1770

Brown University Archives
University and Slavery

• Student debates over slavery

But the opinion that one man is inferior to another, on account of his color, is an opinion which the dictates of nature command us to reject. It is an opinion which will never be admitted by any, except those who are prompted by avarice to encroach upon the sacred rights of their fellow men, and are vainly endeavoring to appease a vindictive conscience.

James Tallmadge commencement speech, 1790
Brown University Archives
University and Slavery

• Student debates over slavery

• President Francis Wayland (1796-1865)
  4th president, 1827-1855
  Conservative abolitionist

• 21 students died for Union; 13 students died for Confederacy
Recommendations

• Tell the truth in all its complexity

• Memorialization
Slavery Memorial Announced
February, 2012

• American artist Martin Puryear selected to create a slavery memorial.

• Memorial will be on the front campus near University Hall.

• “This memorial will invite thoughtful inquiry about the world we have inherited and contemplation of the values we embrace and intend to pass on.” President Ruth J. Simmons
Recommendations

• Tell the truth in all its complexity

• Memorialization

• Create a center for continuing research on slavery and justice
Established 2012/2013

B. Anthony Bogues, Professor of Africana Studies, named Director

2 additional staff members

6-member Faculty Advisory Board
2012-2013 theme: Ships of Bondage, Freedom, and the Knowledges of the Enslaved
• Films (Feb 2013)
• Teach-ins (March 2013)
• Music (April 2013)
• Scholarly conference (May 2013)
• Exhibition (May 2013)

In 2013-2014: Graduate Student Colloquium on Slavery “Slave – Citizen – Human” (Oct 2013)
Recommendations

- Tell the truth in all its complexity
- Memorialization
- Create a center for continuing research on slavery and justice
- Maintain high ethical standards in regards to investments and gifts
• Expand opportunities at Brown for those disadvantaged by the legacies of slavery and the slave trade

• Use the resources of the University to help ensure a quality education for the children of Rhode Island

• Appoint a committee to monitor implementation of these recommendations
University Response

• Historian to write more complete history of the University

• Exhibits

• Fellowship for Study of Public History of Slavery

• $10 million for Fund for Education of the Children of Providence ($1.5 million raised, $300,000 awarded)

• Urban Education Fellows Program: M.A.T. graduates teach 3 years in Providence urban core for loan forgiveness
First Readings provides first-year and transfer students with a common reading experience

Library website provides students sources for historical research

Sons of Providence explores the contentious relationship between Moses and John Brown

Charles Rappleye spoke on campus in October 2012
New President Christina Paxson led a *First Readings* session

Reflected on *Sons of Providence* in her first Convocation:

“...the part of the debate that focused on facts, ideas, and a serious consideration of moral principles did have a slow but steady effect on society. The ability of men and women to think independently and with open minds was integral to the spread of the abolition movement that changed the world for the better. This lesson is as relevant today as it has ever been.”
Websites

Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice
http://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/

Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice
http://brown.edu/initiatives/slavery-and-justice/

Voyage of the Slave Ship Sally
http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/sally/

Sons of Providence *First Readings*
http://library.brown.edu/firstreading2012/
Questions?

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