

# Rhode Island Slavery *and the University*

Jennifer Betts, University Archivist, Brown University  
Society of American Archivists, NOLA 2013



*A S.W. view of the COLLEGE in Providence, together with the PRESIDENT'S HOUSE & GARDENS.*

# Pre-Slavery and Justice Committee

March 2001

David Horowitz's "Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea and Racist Too"

July 2001

President Ruth Simmons sworn in

2002

Lawsuit against corporations mentioned Harvard, Yale, and Brown benefitted from slavery



Brown University  
Steering Committee on

# Slavery and Justice

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

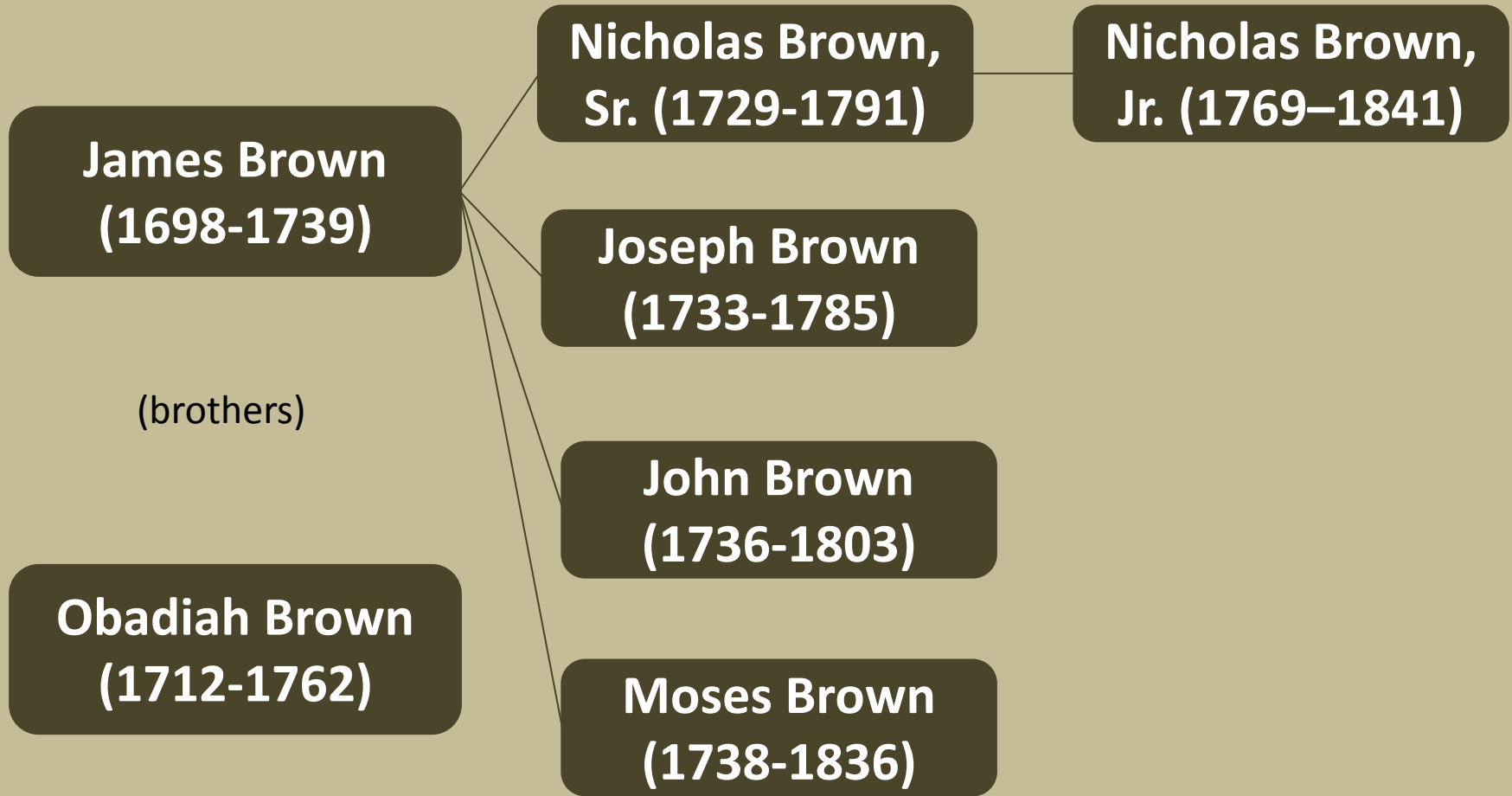
Charge to the committee



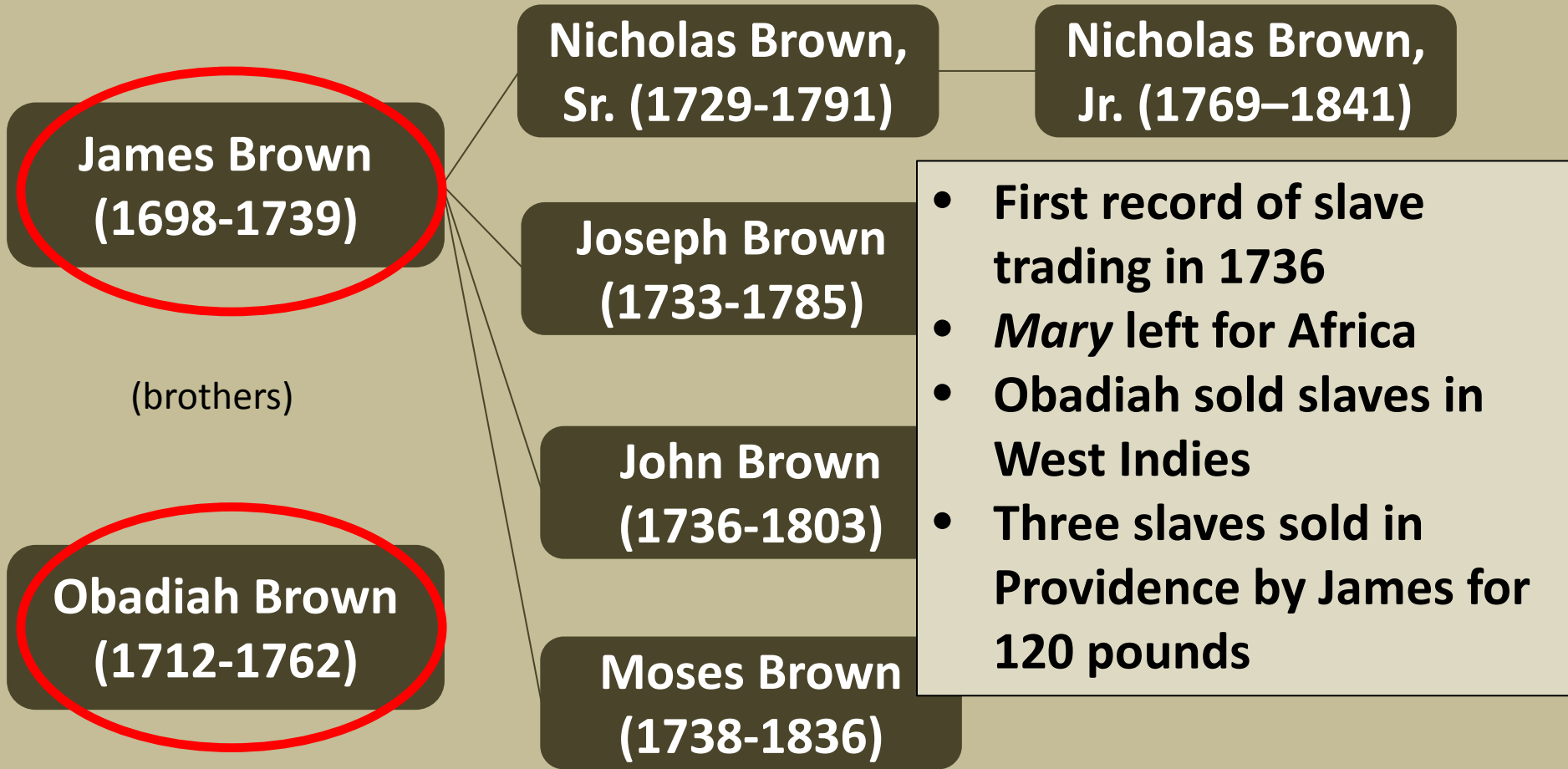
# Rhode Island and Slavery

- 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 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Rhode Island ships transported 106,000 slaves

# Brown Family Tree



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James Brown  
(1698-1739)

(brothers)

Obadiah Brown  
(1712-1762)

Nicholas Brown,  
Sr. (1729-1791)

Joseph Brown  
(1733-1785)

John Brown  
(1736-1803)

Moses Brown  
(1738-1836)

- ***Sally, 1764-65:*** 109 of 196 slaves died from revolt, disease, suicide, and starvation
- **Captain Esek Hopkins:**
- First commander in chief of US Navy during Revolutionary War.
- State legislator
- Brother of Stephen Hopkins
- Strong supporter of College of Rhode Island



<b>Brown Family</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>University</b>
Slave ship <i>Sally</i> sails	1764	College of Rhode Island founded
	1770	College Edifice built
Moses converts to Quakerism	1773	
Moses founds Providence Abolition Society	1789	
John acquitted of illegal slave trading	1796	
Nicholas, Jr. donates \$5,000 to College of Rhode Island	1804	Name changes to Brown University

# University and Slavery

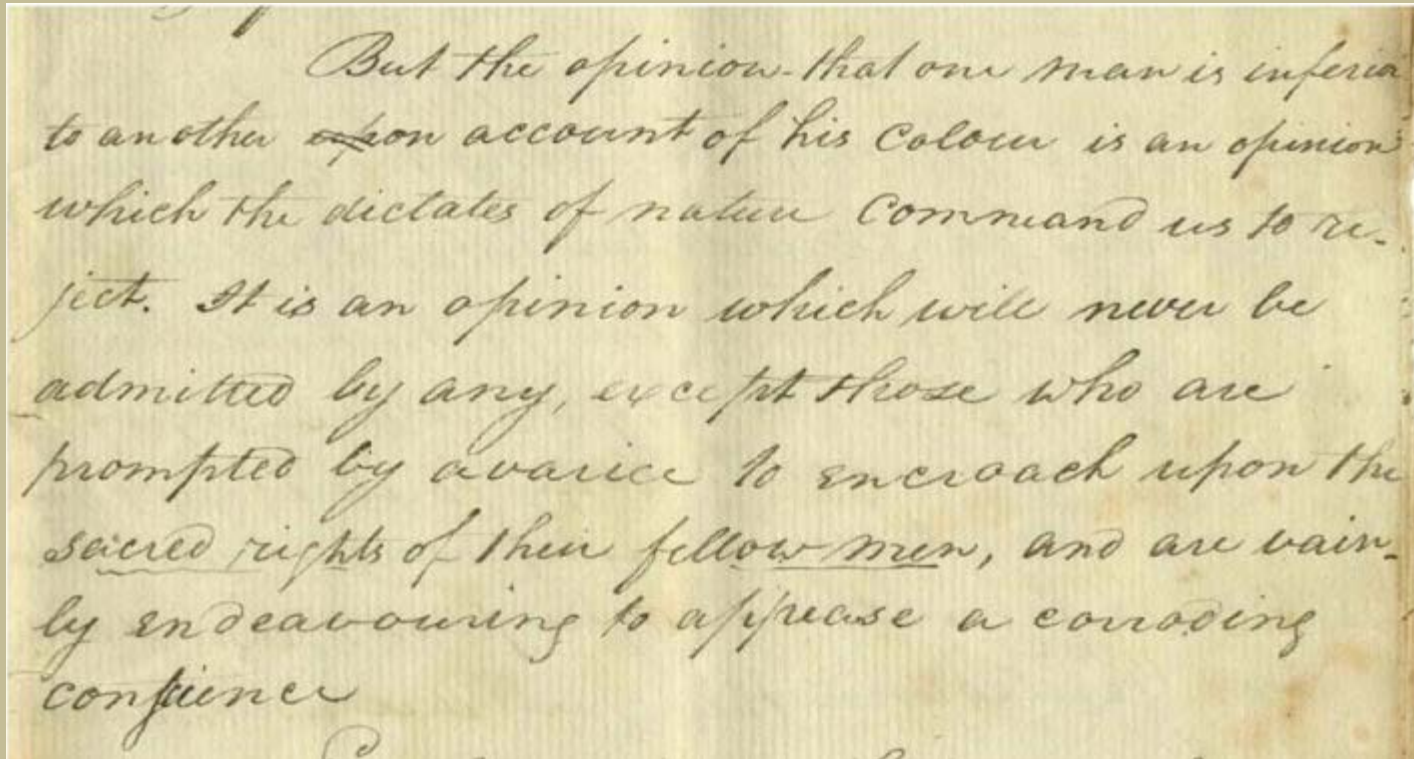
- James Manning owned a slave (freed in 1770)
- 30 members of Corporation owned or captained slave ships
- Lopez and Rivera donated wood to build College Edifice (one of the largest slave trading firms in Newport)
- Hezekiah Smith raised 3,700 Carolina pounds (\$50,000) in South Carolina during 1760s

# Building of College Edifice (University Hall), 1770

28	To Adam for 13 Days Work at the Well a 3/.	1.. 19..
	To P. Adam & Nat. Allen for Ketching Bricks 1 Day each a 3/.	" 6..
30	To Shilds Lime of Old Whipple.	1.. 16..
12: 10-	To Henry Paget Esq. for 29 Days Work of Pero & bill a 3/.	4.. 7..
31	To Cash p. Job Indian for his Work in the Well Extra from other work	" 12..
	Hagran 8 Days a 1/6.	" " 9..
Aug 2	To paid Mingow Negro	" " 9..
	To 3 pints W. R. Run old Simmons for Extraordinary Services.	" 1.. 6
	To 5 Cord of Stones of Jos. Bagley besides the 7 Cord bl. June 27. a 5/3 for 3 1/2 Cord, & 1 1/2 Cord a 1/6.	1.. 8.. 6

# University and Slavery

- Student debates over slavery

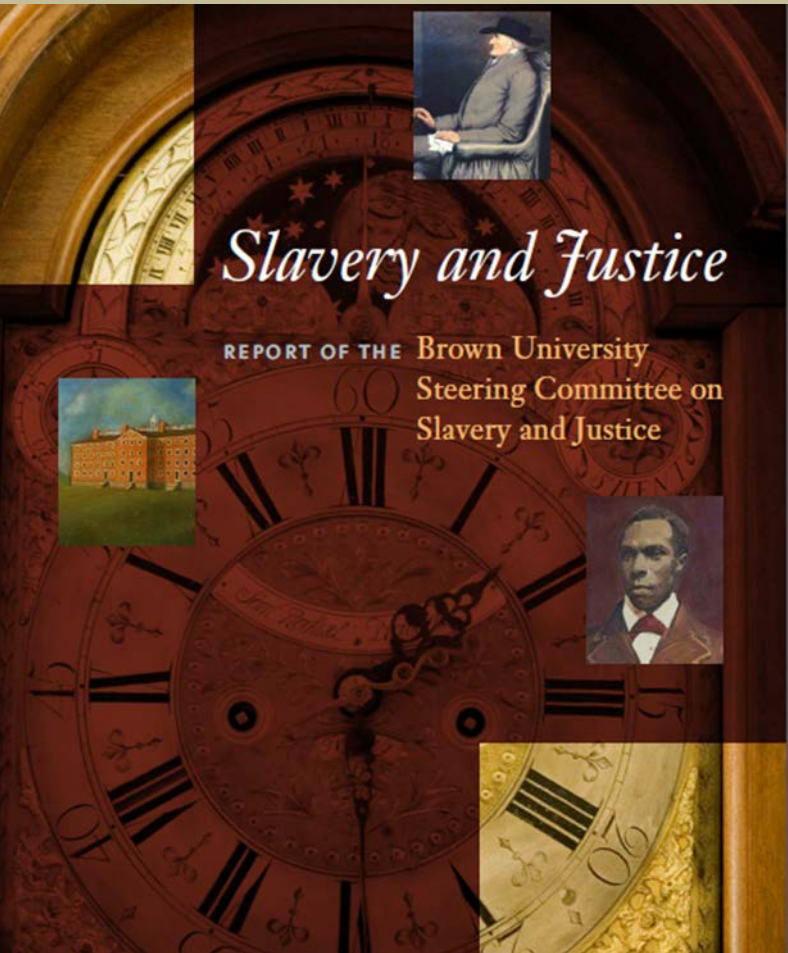
A snippet of a handwritten manuscript in cursive script, likely a commencement speech. The text is written on aged, slightly yellowed paper. The handwriting is clear and legible, with some ink bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. The text discusses the moral implications of slavery, specifically the idea of human inferiority based on skin color and the role of natural command in rejecting such views. It criticizes those who are driven by greed to violate the rights of others, leading to a corrupted conscience.

But the opinion that one man is inferior to another upon account of his colour 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 endeavouring to appease a corroding conscience

James Tallmadge commencement speech, 1790  
Brown University Archives

# University and Slavery

- Student debates over slavery
- President Francis Wayland (1796-1865)  
4<sup>th</sup> president, 1827-1855  
Conservative abolitionist
- 21 students died for Union; 13 students died for Confederacy

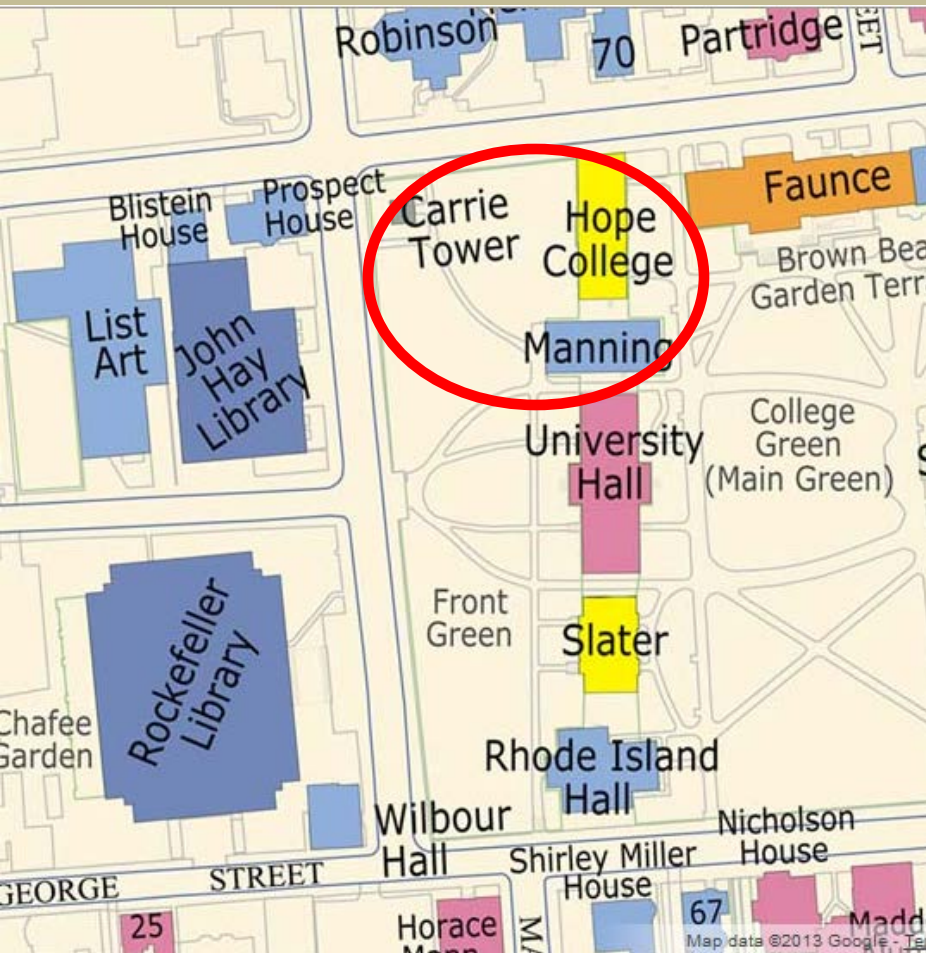


# Recommendations

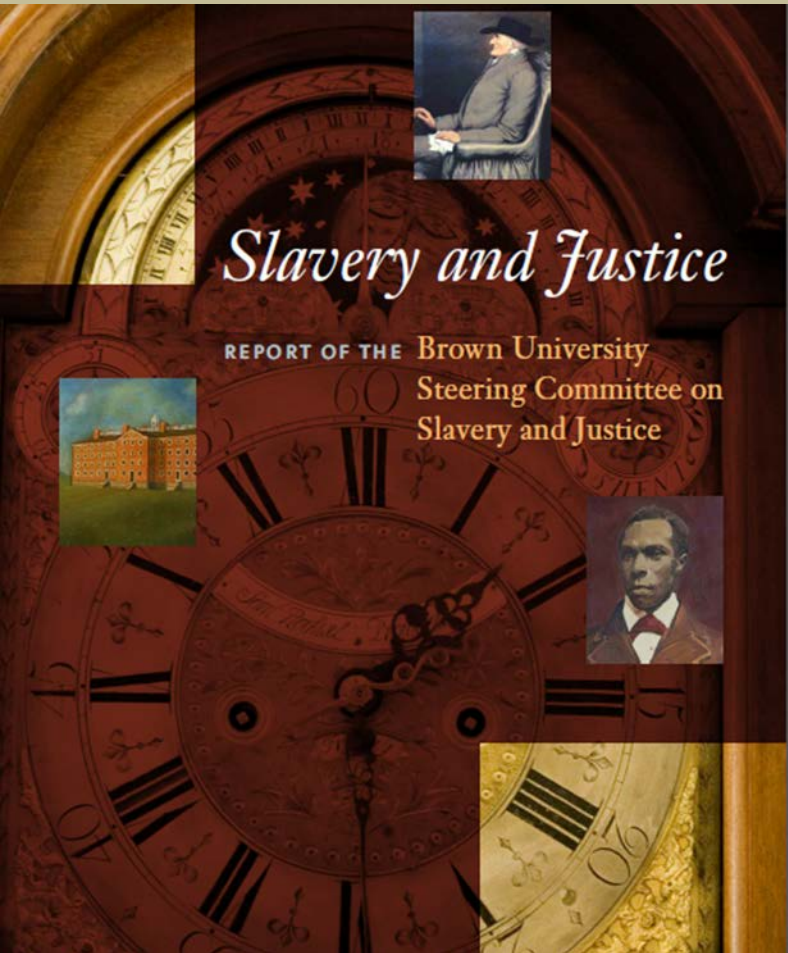
- Tell the truth in all its complexity
- Memorialization

# 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





## CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SLAVERY & JUSTICE

- Established 2012/2013
- B. Anthony Bogues, Professor of Africana Studies, named Director
- 2 additional staff members
- 6-member Faculty Advisory Board

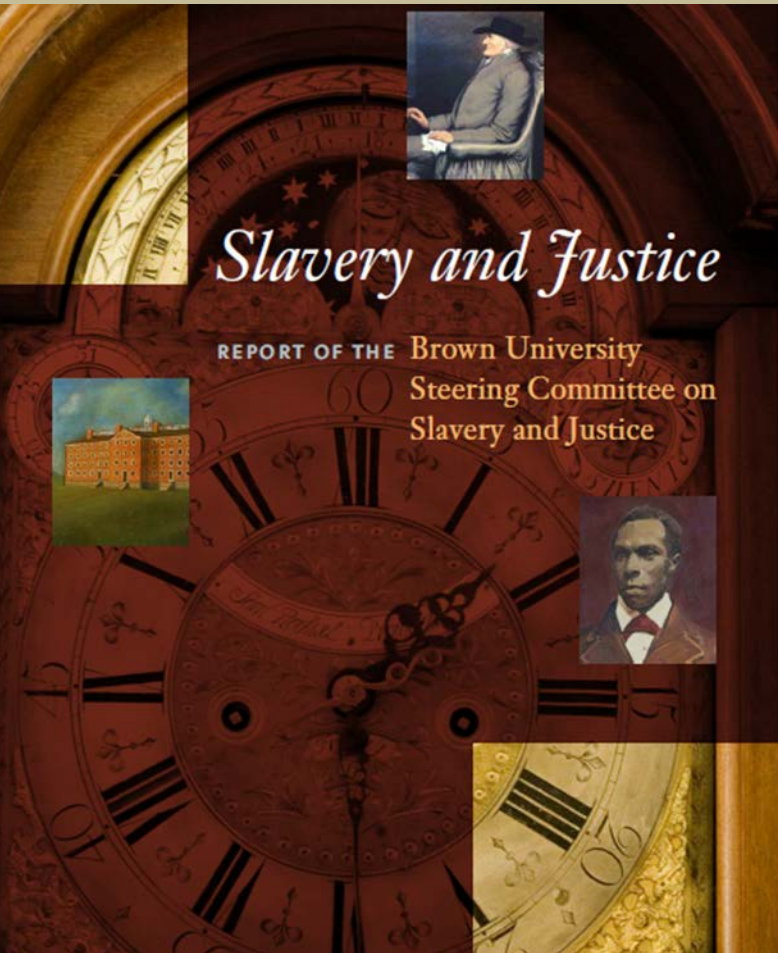


## CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SLAVERY & JUSTICE

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)

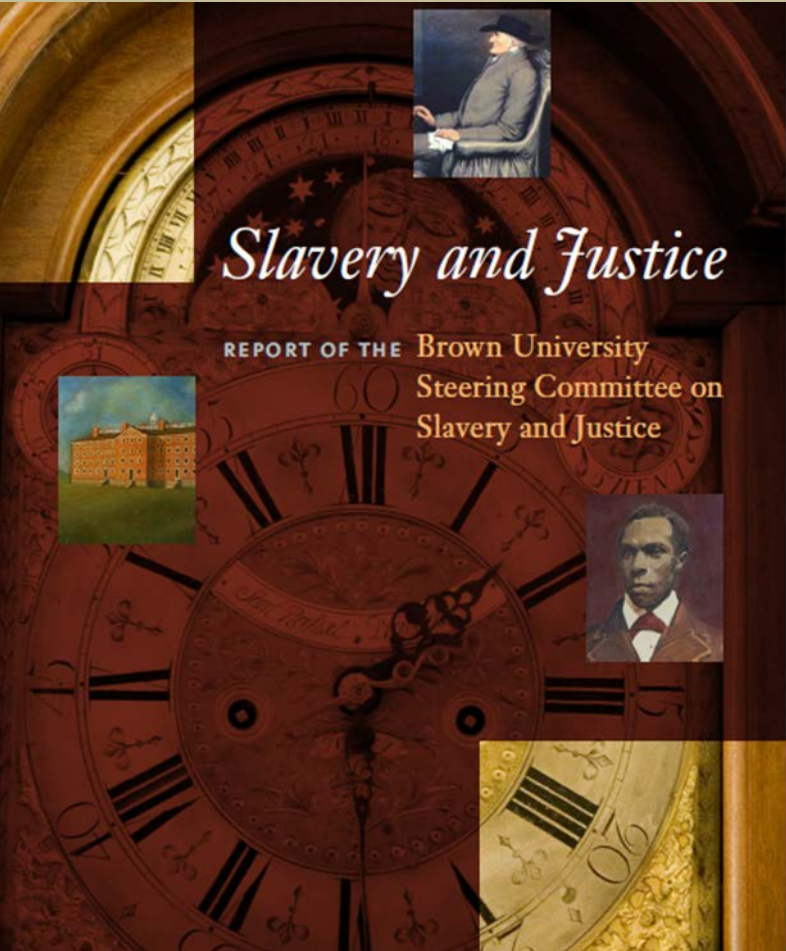
In 2013-2014: Graduate Student Colloquium on Slavery  
“Slave – Citizen – Human” (Oct 2013)



# Recommendations

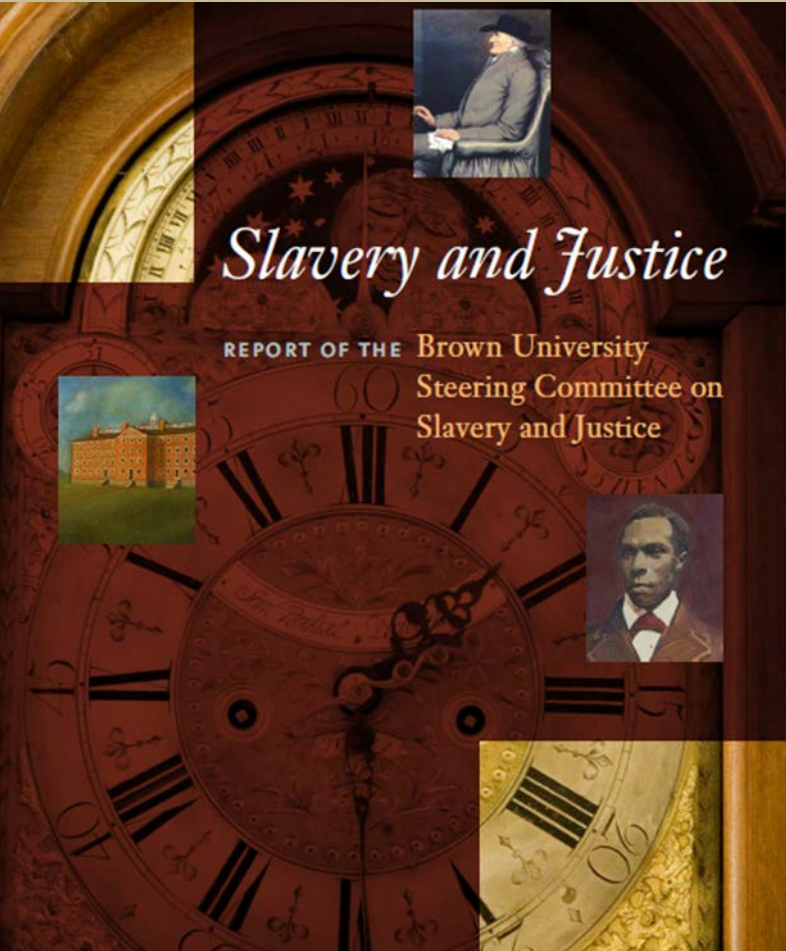
- Tell the truth in all its complexity
- Memorialization
- Create a center for continuing research on slavery and justice
- Maintain high ethical standards in regards to investments and gifts

# Recommendations (continued)



- 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 2012

# SONS *of* PROVIDENCE

BY Charles Rappleye

THE BROWN BROTHERS, THE SLAVE TRADE,  
AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

- *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

First Readings 2012

# SONS of PROVIDENCE

BY Charles Rappleye

THE BROWN BROTHERS, THE SLAVE TRADE,  
AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

- 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/](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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