2016

Slavery in Rhode Island: Awakening a Forgotten Past (poster)

Abudu Adeboye  
Providence College, aadeboye@friars.providence.edu

Cassandra Caggiano  
Providence College, ccaggian@friars.providence.edu

Cassandra M. Chisolm  
Providence College, cchislom@friars.providence.edu

Marisa DelFarno  
Providence College, mdelfarn@friars.providence.edu

Brian Nicholas  
Providence College, bnichola@friars.providence.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.providence.edu/black_studies_students

Part of the Race and Ethnicity Commons, Social History Commons, and the United States History Commons

http://digitalcommons.providence.edu/black_studies_students/1

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Black Studies at DigitalCommons@Providence. It has been accepted for inclusion in Black Studies Student Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Providence. For more information, please contact mcaprio1@providence.edu.
Slavery in Rhode Island: Awakening a Forgotten Past

**Project Statement:** This map serves to raise awareness about the history of slavery in Rhode Island. Despite having played an active role in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, Rhode Island’s involvement is often overlooked or omitted from what we are traditionally taught in historically influenced classes at Providence College. Instead of integrating local history and knowledge into our own curriculum, we learn about slavery through a Eurocentric, Westernized lens. We aim to challenge our narrow teachings about slavery and widen our perspectives by constructing alternative narratives that go against the metanarrative. This map displaces the untold narratives of four areas in Rhode Island: Providence, Bristol, Narragansett and Newport.

Through these stories, we seek to highlight and draw attention to the set of skills, the culture, and the sense of humanity that Black individuals retained throughout their enslavement. By presenting Rhode Island’s involvement in the slave trade, we aim to remind our community that slavery not only existed thousands of miles away from us but also occurred in many familiar places we visit every day. We would not only like to shed light on the hidden history of slavery, but to also raise consciousness about how this history should play a vital part in our education at Providence College.

---

**Providence**

**Brown University:**
The fortune used to fund Brown University on the East Side of Providence was acquired by the trafficking of slaves throughout New England. The Browns family controlled slave trade in Rhode Island.

**The Cathedral of St. John:**
The Cathedral of St. John has begun to create a museum to educate on the Church’s involvement during the 1700s—which is where a majority of Rhode Island’s shipbuilders worshiped.

**Newport**

**Newport Rhode Island Museum of History:**
This building was used as a slave market. The Newport slave traders would turn the sugar cane from Caribbean plantations into rum in Newport. Newport then exported rum to the west coast of Africa in exchange for more slaves.

**Touro Synagogue:**
This is the oldest synagogue in the America dating back to the colonial times. One of the leading contributors toward its construction was Aaron Lopez, who was a Jewish merchant and one of the wealthiest men in Newport. Lopez was heavily involved in the slave trade and controlled close to 30 slave ships by the start of the American revolution.

**Bristol**

**Linden Place:**
This was the home of George DeWolf, who was also the nephew of James DeWolf, another famous slave trader and the second-wealthiest man in the United States. Despite its involvement in the slave trade, it is still hailed as being the “architectural crown jewel” of Bristol’s waterfront district.

**DeWolf Tavern:**
DeWolf Tavern is situated in the historic building once known as DeWolf Rum Distillery. The restaurant’s website lightly notes them as “maritime merchants.” However, James DeWolf was actually one of the most famous slave traders in the United States.

---

1636: Providence is established
1652: slavery abolished in Rhode Island, but unenforced
1696: first slave ship “Sea Flower” arrives in Newport
1708: Black enslaved individuals outnumber white servants in Newport 10:1
1755: 20% of Newport population is enslaved individuals
1800: In Bristol, James DeWolf is one of the top slave traders in the country
1831: race riots take place in Providence
1838: first public school for black children established on Meeting Street in Providence
1861: Civil War begins
1863: black leaders begin movement to integrate schools in RI
1896: Plessy v Ferguson established “separate but equal” doctrine