Power, Privilege & Social Justice:
History of African American Civil Rights in Providence, RI

Part One:
Early African Arrivals & Resistance
The research and images for this presentation were made possible through the generous time, consideration and contributions from the following Rhode Island institutions and their collections.

- Rhode Island Black Heritage Society
- Rhode Island Historical Society
- Newport Historical Society
- Rhode Island State Archives
- City of Providence Archives
- Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
- Special Collections, Adams Library, Rhode Island College
- Special Collections, Phillips Memorial Library, Providence College
- Special Collections, Newport Public Library
- Stokes Family Collection
As we are in the midst of a worldwide Black Lives Matter and social justice movement, the right to be heard as people of African heritage is tantamount with building a more just society.

Here in Rhode Island, there are many historic documents that amplify what Black voices have said about Rhode Island and America within the legacies of slavery, discrimination, and most importantly, our “Creative Survival.”

The challenge oftentimes is before achieving solidarity and action, we need to listen, and we need to learn from those in history that have led and born witness to the struggles to achieve equal rights for all.
It is important to recognize that Africa’s history did not start with slavery. Well before European arrival on the African continent. African societies were civilized, organized and contained technologically advanced peoples.

Major empires would emerge in West Africa, most notably the Ghana Empire, Mali, Kingdom of Nri, Yoruba and Akan Empire of Ashanti. Gold, Rice Cultivation and Salt were all major trade products.

The Gold Coast, Barbados and Jamaica share particularly strong historical links through the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade that forced the immigration of thousands upon thousands of Africans, with many representing the Ashanti and Fante tribal people to the Caribbean countries.

These craft skills would be transported along with the enslaved to the Americas and help build the massive wealth found in the cash crop commodities of sugar, coffee, tobacco and rice cultivation.

The people along the African West Coast have traditionally been among the most skilled and productive craftsmen of Africa. Craftsmanship has a long history in West Africa. Iron working dates back to the 4th century and blacksmiths, weavers, leather workers, sliver and goldsmiths were active long before European colonization.
18th Century: Early African Arrivals

- Between 1705 & 1807, Rhode Island merchants sponsored 934 documented slave voyages to West Africa and carried over 100,000 enslaved Africans back to the West Indies and British North America.
  
  - 672 ships sailed from Newport.
  - 167 ships sailed from Bristol
  - 71 ships sailed from Providence
  - 21 ships sailed from Warren
  - 3 ships sailed from Tiverton, North Kingstown & Little Compton

- Most Africans arriving in Colonial Newport came from Gold, Guinea & Cape Coasts of West Africa oftentimes via the Barbados and Jamaica.

- The Africans who would arrive as “Forced Immigrants” would bring with them not only their labor, but religion, language, food stuffs and cultural traditions all of which would become a part of the earliest settlement and social fabric of Rhode Island.
TRIANGULAR TRADE
AS ILLUSTRATED BY VOYAGE OF THE Sanderson
SAILING FROM NEWPORT, R.I., IN MARCH, 1752

Carrying 55 hogsheads of molasses, 3 hogsheads, 27 barrels of sugar, and £412:35. bills of exchange on Liverpool

Carrying 8,220 gallons of rum, some "African iron" (short bars used as currency among African natives) etc.

Carrying 56 slaves.
God’s Little Acre
Final Resting Place for People of the African Diaspora
The Business of Slavery in Rhode Island

The Sugar Act of 1764 was a revenue-raising act passed by the Parliament of Great Britain and New England ports especially suffered economic losses from taxation upon molasses transport from the West Indies and rum production in the Americas.

Rhode Island Governor Josiah Lyndon at Newport sent a January 26, 1764 letter to the British Lord Commissioners for Trade & Plantations highlighting:

- The Colony of Rhode Island includes not much larger content of territory than about thirty miles square. And of this a great part is of barren soil not worth the expense of cultivation.
- It is this quantity of molasses which serves as an engine in the hands of the merchant.
- Formerly the Negro upon the coast (Africa) were supplied with French Brandy, but in the year 1723 some merchants in this Colony introduced the use of rum.
- There are now upwards of 30 distilleries in the Colony.

“If you say you have the right to enslave (Negroes) because it is for your interest, why do you dispute the legality of Great Britain’s enslaving you?”

– A True Son of Liberty, Newport Mercury, January 8, 1768
Fort William at Anomabo in today’s Ghana was at the center of the British Slave Trade along the West African Gold Coast and one of the largest exporters of enslaved Africans to the West Indies and British North America.

Rhode Island merchants were frequent traders at Anomabo.

Many Africans to eventually arrived from Anomabo hailed from the Akan people including Ashanti and Fanti tribes.

The Akan people of Ghana frequently named their children after the day of the week they were born and the order in which they were born.

Many Africans once in Rhode Island would maintain and reclaim their African traditions, including the “Day Naming” Tradition.

- Quash (Kwasi): Boys born on Sunday
- Cudjo (Kojo): Boys born on Monday
- Quarco (Kwaku): Boys born on Wednesday
- Cuffe (Kofi): Boys born on Friday
- Quamino (Kwame): Boys born on Saturday
- Mimba/Mimbo: Girls born on Saturday
- Juba (Ajoba): Girls born on Monday
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Sample of African Day Names in Colonial Rhode Island</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Quarco Honeyman</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Cuffe Cockroach</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Cufhee Newport</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Quash Mowatt</td>
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<td>• Quarko Malbone</td>
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<td>• Oroko Robinson</td>
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<td>• Juba Ellery</td>
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<td>• Quarker Rivera</td>
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<td>• Cujo Lopez</td>
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<td>• Mimbo Oliver</td>
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<td>• Quamino Brown</td>
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<td>• Cuff Sexias</td>
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<td>• Jubaford Greenhill</td>
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<td>• Cuff Arnold</td>
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<td>• Cuff Blackamore</td>
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Resistance
African Mariners In Colonial New England

- The peculiar institution of slavery in New England had its start and evolution with the sea.

- And in New England, one of the best paths for African freedom and prosperity led back to the sea.

- Early American maritime industry was a meritocracy. Crew were hired based on their skill and ability, not on race.

- In his award-winning book, “Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail,” author W. Jeffery Bolster points out that seafaring was one of the most significant occupations among both enslaved and free African heritage men in the 18th and 19th centuries.

- Jay Coughtry in “The Notorious Triangle” reported that African heritage seaman comprised up to 21% of all Newport crews engaged in the West Indian, European and African trade.
Many enslaved Africans would choose the path to freedom as runaways.

In reviewing runaway slave advertisements of the time, there are a significant number of enslaved who escaped from one slave community to “hide in plain sight” within New England coastal urban centers.

This logical action found enslaved Africans fleeing from a New York or Boston to live relatively free lives in a New Bedford, Newport and Providence.
Ten Dollars Reward.

AN away from the Subscriber, on the 1st Day of September inl., a Negro Man named CUDGO, about 5 Feet 5 Inches high, a black, stout, well made, smart, active Fellow, about 20 Years old; carried away with him, a mixed light, colour'd Broadcloth Coat, 1 red speckled Jacket, 1 Strip'd Flannel Jacket, 2 Pair of Trowsers, 1 Pair of Shoes, a round Hat almost new, and sundry other Articles, which he stole and carried off. All Persons are hereby forbid harbouring or employing said Runaway; and all Masters of Vessels are forbid carrying him off on Penalty of the Law.

ROWLAND BROWN.
South Kingston, Sept. 8, 1798.
Resistance
To Escape In Plain Sight

RAN away from his master, the subscriber, the 6th of August infant, a Negro man slave, named YORK, 36 years of age, about 5 feet high, speaks good English, is very black, full ey’d, two large fore teeth in the upper jaw, something light framed, a nimble, active, complaisant fellow, of an insinuating address; had on, when he went away, a check’d shirt, striped holland waistcoat, sheepskin leather breeches, white yarn stockings, a pair of half worn shoes, and a small beaver hat: Whoever will apprehend the said runaway, and bring him to his master, or secure him in any of his Majesty’s gaols, in this colony, so that his master may have him again, shall have FOUR DOLLARS reward, and all reasonable charges, paid by

JOSEPH UNDERWOOD.

N.B. It is suspected that the said NEGRO left Newport, the 12th of August infant, to go to Nantucket, from thence to fail on a whaling voyage.—All masters of vessels and others, are hereby warned against entertaining, concealing, or carrying off said runaway, as they would avoid the penalty of the law.

Newport, Rhode-Island, Aug. 12, 1774.
Immediately after the American Revolution and the gradual abolition of slavery by 1784, free Africans in Newport and Providence and their counterparts in Boston and Philadelphia would embrace their new identity as “Africans in America.”

One of their first acts as free men is the establishment of America’s first Black civic institutions that would become the guiding light for all African heritage people from enslavement to freedom.

These new institutions would assertively embrace an African identity in their very names including the African Union Society, African Church, African Lodge and African School.
Africans As Americans:
Black Voices & Origins of the Black Church

- In 1780, a group of African men assembled at the Newport home of Abraham Casey to organize and charter America’s first mutual aid society for African and later African Americans known as the Free African Union Society.

- The organization predated Rhode Island Slavery Emancipation by 4 Years.

- The African Union Society would later evolve into the Union Colored Congregational Church in 1824.

- Nuba Tikey (aka Arthur Flagg)
- Salmar Nubia (aka Jack Mason)
- Bristol Yamma
- Quam Bowers
- Zingo Stevens
- Congo Jenkins
- Quash Mowat

- Cubber Rodman
- Cuffe Mumford
- Cudjo Hicks
- Abraham Casey
- Occramar Marycoo (aka Newport Gardner)
- Anthony Taylor
Evolution of Black Church in America

- Free African Union Society, Newport – 1780
- Free African Society, Philadelphia – 1787
- Free African Union Society, Boston - 1787
- Free African Society, Providence - 1789
Evolution of African Community in Providence

- The Providence Free African Union Society was organized in 1789, and at least five men who lived on College Hill—London Spear, William Stoves, Bonner Brown, Cudge Brown, and Bristol Olney were founding members.

- By 1790, 475 people of color lived Providence, 427 of them free people and 48 enslaved, the majority living in two census districts on the East Side: the district north of present-day College Street included 93 free and 11 enslaved people of color, while the district to the south included 208 free and 20 enslaved people.
Unknown No Longer
Free African Heritage Head of Households in Providence - 1790

Samuel Sharp
Harry Tabor
Peter Browning
Plato M’Leannen
Peter Barras
Cesar Waterman
Bazil Human
Primus Hopkins
William Cesar
Jack Smith
Sant Hopkins
Thomas Pegan
Brittan Saltonston
James Lippitt
Prince Jencks
London Brown
Bonner Brown
Primus George
Bristol Onley
Pleasant Hicks
Quam Nightingale
Cuff Easterbrooks
Quam Simmons
Comfort Ephraim
Mode Siscoe
Medford Keen
Newport Tew
Yockey Fenner
Primus Brown
William Stoves
Pamp Hopkins
Patience Sterry
Robert Wainwood
Abijah Read

Cesar Lyndon
Isaac Cooper
James McKenzie
Prime Cushing
Baston Ruggles
Liverpool Brown
Providence Brown
Cato Johnston
Mary Newfield
Waitstill Brown
London Spear
Cudge Earl
Cato Gardner
York Champlin
Newport Arrow
Dick Cozzens
Quaco Johnston
Sampson Hazzard
Patience Gardner
Bristol Yamma
Fortune Standford
Member Nava
Cato Freeman
York Hanover
Quaco Butler
Jacob Freeman
Ebar Hopkins
Ebin Sico
Tobey Harris
Deborah Church
Disimo Bay
Freelove Parker
Cato Coggeshall
Lewis Manning
Unknown No Longer
Free African Heritage Head of Households in Providence - 1790
Rhode Island Origins of the Back To Africa Movement

In 1773, Newport Congregational Ministers Samuel Hopkins and Ezra Stiles collaborate on a plan to send African men to Africa to evangelize the continent.

They secured two volunteers, Bristol Yamma and John Quamino who were sent to study at the College of New Jersey (Princeton).

These would be the first African heritage persons to enroll in college in America.

Their studies were disrupted in 1776 by the American Revolution.
John Quamino would send a June 6, 1776 letter to Moses Brown of Providence thanking him for his courage to take on the abolition of slavery, where he stated:

“Having some late understanding of your noble and distinguished character and boundless benevolence with regards to the unforfeited rights of the poor unhappy Africans of this province and of your sundry petitions to the General Assemblies in their favor, has excited one of that nation, though an utter stranger, to present gratitude and thanks before you for all your excellent endeavors for the speedy salvation of his poor enslaved countrymen, and for what you were kindly disposed to do already of this kind in freeing all your servants. Hoping that you will be highly rewarded hereafter by Him who has promised to remember the merciful at the great reckoning day.”

In 1779, Quamino is killed at sea serving on a Privateer.
The next effort was launched after the American Revolution with Rev. Hopkins of Newport and Moses Brown of Providence working with the African Union Societies.

Newport, Jan ye 24 A.D., 1787
Sir,

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 particular and fuller idea of our proposal, agreeable to the Articles heretofore agreed upon by the Union Society, with a view to prosecute the affair......

Your h'ble Serv't,
Anthony Taylor in the Name of Union Society

Providence, Aug. 5th, 1789
Dear Brethren,

We are happy to inform you that we received your Letter directed to Mr. Cato Gardner and Mr. London Spear, in which you enclosed your Grand Proposals. They have exerted their faculties and assembled our brethren together and laid before them your important Letter, and it is with pleasure we can inform you of the great satisfaction that it gave them in thinking that there is some of our own brethren that has taken that matter into consideration.....

We are, with esteem and affection brethren,
Bristol Yamma & James McKenzie
The African Union Society of Newport and the African Society of Providence selected three men to travel to West Africa: William Olney and James McKenzie, secretary of Providence, and Newport Gardner, secretary of Newport.

- On 4 December 1794, James McKenzie boarded the Charlotte and sailed for Sierra Leone from Providence.

- The Governor of Sierra Leone offered that twelve Rhode Island families could immigrate to Sierra Leone as long as their character could be attested to by a leading man.

- Rev. Samuel Hopkins turned down James McKenzie and the request.
**THE THIRD EFFORT**

**Success & Tragedy**

- On January 4th, 1826 setting sail from Boston on the Brig Vine, thirty-two members of the African Societies from Providence and Newport would arrive in Liberia, West Africa on February 6th.

- Ironically, nearly all the party succumb to fever and died within a year.

- Triumphantly, they had not died in a land where men were held as slaves. They died free in their own land.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Newport Gardner</em></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Fetty Fitch 45</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ahema Gardner</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Salmar Nubia</em></td>
<td>70</td>
<td>John Wainwood 68</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Aaron Chavers</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td></td>
<td>John Chavers Sr.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sarah Chavers</td>
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<td>John Chavers Jr.</td>
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<td>James Chavers</td>
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<td>Samuel Chavers</td>
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<td>Sarah Chavers</td>
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<td>Henry Clark</td>
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<td>Charlotte Clark</td>
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<td>Curdy Clark</td>
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<td>Francis Clark</td>
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<td>Charlotte Clark</td>
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End of the 18th Century

- By the end of the 18th century, African heritage people in Rhode Island are mostly free and with access to trade skills and religious affiliations.

- Newport and Providence have emerged as major centers of free African heritage life in early America along with Boston, New York and Philadelphia defined by African meeting houses, schools and civic institutions.

- The 19th century would bring new challenges and discrimination to overcome including surviving race riots, equal access to public education, voting rights and civil rights.

- PART 2: SEPARATE and UNEQUAL
Part One:
Early African Arrivals & Resistance

“It is the human being that counts. I call gold; it does not answer. I call cloth; it does not answer. It is the human being that counts.”

~Ghanaian Proverb

For more information on this program and resources on Racial Justice offered by Providence Community Library, visit:

https://www.provcomlib.org/resources-racial-justice
provcomlib.org
origins@riblackheritage.org