

MAY 1996



Rhode Island History

A RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION

Volume 54, Number 2



MAY 1996

Rhode Island History

Volume 54, Number 2

Published by
The Rhode Island Historical Society
110 Benevolent Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02906-3152
and printed by a grant from the State of
Rhode Island and Providence Plantations,
Lincoln Almond, Governor;
James R. Langevin, Secretary of State

Grafton H. Willey III, *president*
Edward J. Spargo, *vice president*
Donald F. Keinz, *vice president for development*
Nancy K. Cassidy, *secretary*
Ray Rickman, *assistant secretary*
Richard F. Staples, Jr., *treasurer*
Lisa Madison, *assistant treasurer*
Albert T. Klyberg, *director*

FELLOWS OF THE SOCIETY

Carl Bridenbaugh
Antoinette F. Downing
Glenn W. LaFantasie

PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

Anne Marshall Christner, *chair*
Pedro Beade
Joyce M. Botelho
Norman S. Fiering
Robert Allen Greene
James P. Marusak
Thomas McAvoy
William McKenzie Woodward
Harrison M. Wright

STAFF

Marta V. Martínez, *editor*
Hilliard Beller, *copy editor*
Allison Cywin, *graphics editor*
Nancy J. Thornton, *publication assistant*

The Rhode Island Historical Society
assumes no responsibility for the
opinions of contributors.

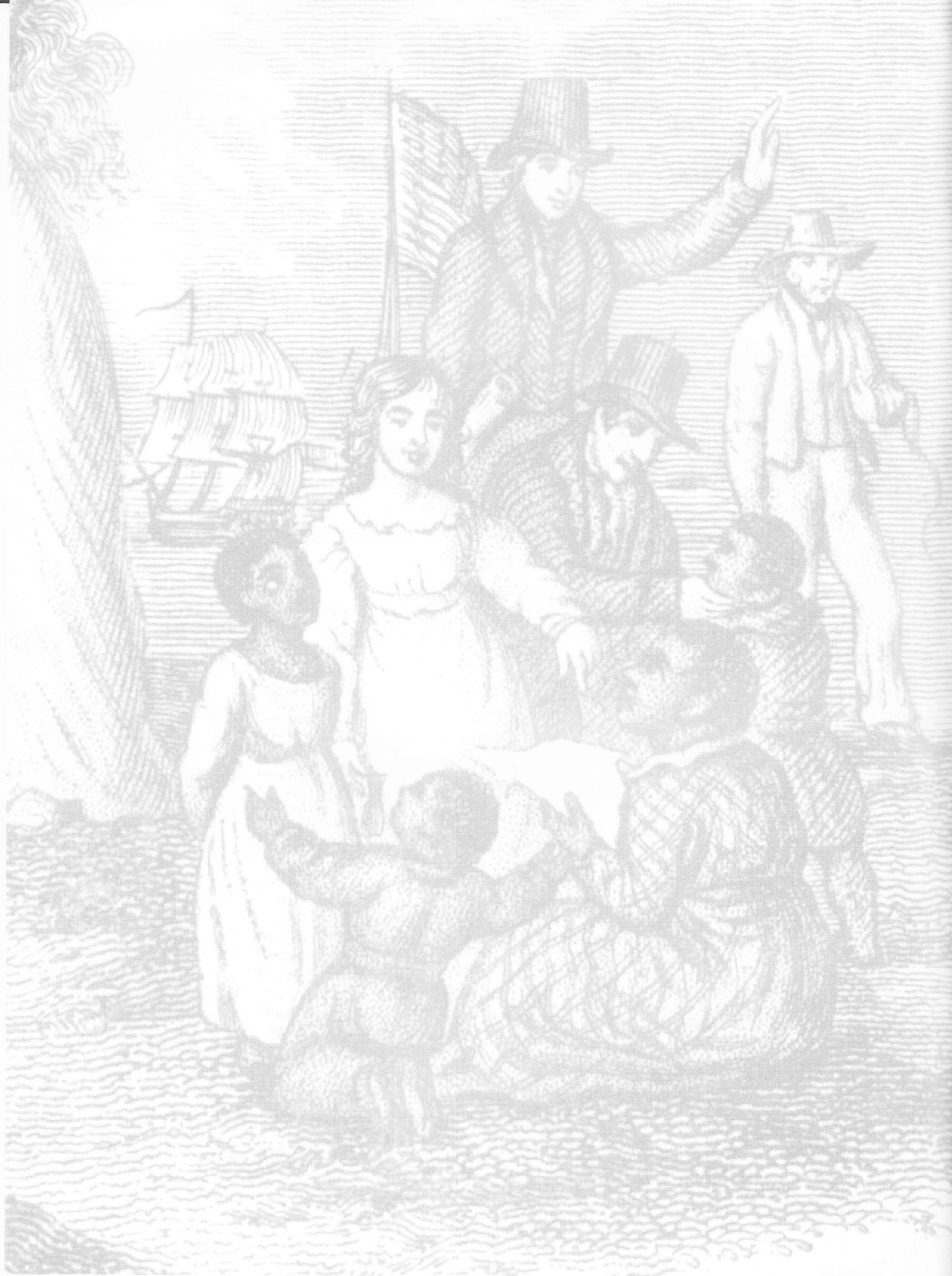
CONTENTS

The Last Years of the Rhode Island Slave Trade 35

CHRISTY MILLARD NADALIN

"Every Shout a Cannon Ball": The IWW and Urban Disorders in Providence, 1912-1914 51

JOSEPH W. SULLIVAN



The Last Years of the Rhode Island Slave Trade

CHRISTY MILLARD NADALIN

During the later eighteenth century, America was essentially divided into two regions: the northern commercial region and the southern agrarian region. Characteristically, there was a great demand for cheap labor in the South, while the economy in the North depended upon trade and commerce for its continued health. The demands of these two regions worked together to create a system of trade with Africa, the West Indies, and other points south. Whether called the southern trade, African trade, Guinea trade, or triangle trade, it involved (in a greatly simplified model) receiving such raw materials as molasses and sugar from the West Indies, converting them into products for export in the Northeast, trading these products for slaves in Africa, and exchanging the slaves for cash and more raw materials in Cuba, the West Indies, or the American colonies. Although there were many other products involved in the southern trade, slaves were by far the most profitable.

Rhode Island, the smallest of the thirteen American colonies, took a special interest in the slave trade. Until the 1760s slaving was widely considered to be a reasonable and (in many circles) respectable way to earn a living, and many New England merchants—from Newport, Rhode Island, north to Salem, Massachusetts, and Portsmouth, New Hampshire—were involved in the traffic. As time went on, however, the trade began to fall out of favor in the other northern colonies, but not in Rhode Island.

By the late 1700s the slave trade had become very limited in the other New England states, but in Rhode Island it continued to flourish. There is no certain reason why this was so. Although Rhode Island imported few slaves for its own use, it functioned as a clearinghouse for the trade of other colonies, and many Rhode Islanders considered the slave trade a business much like any other. That merchants from “Rogue’s Island” engaged in such an unpleasant business may have been readily understandable in Massachusetts, whose residents had long tended to regard their neighbors to the south with suspicion and disdain. In addition, Rhode Island’s jagged coastline was especially conducive to illegal trade, since ships could easily hide in the many harbors and coves. But neither the moral character nor the geography of Rhode Island seems to convincingly explain the popularity of the traffic in slaves.

Perhaps the most likely explanation may be (as one historian puts it) that “the slave trade was simply the most profitable method of selling rum, Rhode Island’s most important export.”¹ A probable contributing factor was Rhode Island’s individualism, a trait evidenced by the state’s reluctance to join the Union. As the trade became increasingly distasteful to the general public, it was abandoned by the vast majority of businessmen in other areas of the Northeast, but Rhode Island merchants went their own way in continuing the traffic through the first decade of the nineteenth century. In Rhode Island, the last of the origi-



Illustration from an antislavery broadside, 1832. RIHS Collection (RH1 X3 4672).

Christy Millard Nadalin, a graduate of the University of New Hampshire, is currently a free-lance associate television producer.

Newport, July 6, 1764.
 Just imported in the Sloop *Elizabeth*,
 from *Africa*, and to be sold, by
John Miller,
 At his House, or Store ;
A Number of healthy
 Negro Boys and Girls.
 Likewise to be sold,—*Tillock's* and *Kip-*
pen's Snuff, by the Cask or Dozen.

*Advertisement in the Providence Gazette and
 Country Journal, 28 July 1764. RIHS
 Collection (RHi X3 5421).*

nal thirteen states to ratify the Constitution, many merchants chose to ignore state and (to a lesser degree) federal antislavery legislation in what might well be regarded as an analogous spirit of autonomy.

The growing struggle over the slave trade was intensified in the state by the influence of the Quakers and other groups who vehemently objected to what they saw as an immoral practice. As the eighteenth century moved toward its end, Rhode Island, with its flourishing and visible slave trade and its equally visible abolition movement, became the battleground for a protracted fight between those who wanted the trade abolished and the merchants who enjoyed the high profits that it yielded.



Rhode Island traders transported slaves and other cargo along the “triangular” trade routes in specialized brigs. These were relatively small, fast ships, but with a great deal of cargo space below decks. Conditions were crowded and unsanitary, and when illness struck, it often spread like wildfire through the human cargo. This was a formula for a disastrous voyage, such as that of the Nicholas Brown and Company’s ship *Sally* in 1765. Under Captain Esek Hopkins, the *Sally* left the shores of Africa and headed westward along the “middle passage” in August of that year. Shortly thereafter Captain Hopkins began to record slave deaths in his log book. These were mostly due to disease, although eight were killed in a slave revolt, most likely brought on by fear of the epidemic on board. The remaining slaves were “so disperited” that “some drowned themselves, some starved, and others sickened and died.” By the end of the voyage at least 109 slaves were dead, and Nicholas Brown and Company lost over ten thousand dollars on the venture.²

Cases of brutality occasionally resulted from fears of financial loss due to slave mortality or revolt. In one such instance, Captain James DeWolf was charged with the murder of a female slave stricken with smallpox. In a deposition before His Excellency Joannes Runnels of Saint Eustatius in 1794, two crewman said that “no alternative was left to save the Crew and Cargo, which consisted of one hundred and forty-two Souls, but to throw this one, so dangerously infected, overboard; which was accordingly done.”³ This example of brutality was really no more than representative of the injustices perpetrated against the Africans who were brought to North America. Despite the inherent brutality of slavery, those with interests in the trade considered it only as a business, subject only to judgments from an economic standpoint.

The dangers of the slave trade were not confined to the slaves. Many seamen were stricken by tropical diseases such as yellow fever, and mortality rates were high among the crews. The sheer danger involved in embarking on a slaving voyage contributed to making slaving a highly profitable enterprise. When successful, such a voyage was the quickest way for an eighteenth-century businessman to make his fortune.

Molasses and sugar, used to manufacture the potent variety of rum so popular on the African coast, were an integral part of the slave trade. The center of rum production, as well as the home of the vast majority of the merchants and vessels engaged in the trade, was Rhode Island. In the mid-1700s as many as thirty Rhode Island distilleries were involved in the production of rum at any given time.⁴ For this reason it would seem that Rhode Island's economy was heavily dependent on the slave trade, a dependency that merchants could cite in the face of opposition from the growing abolitionist movement.

It was unlikely, however, that the economic structure of Providence would have collapsed even if the trade had ended abruptly; by the late eighteenth century the town had developed a relatively broad economic base. Initially the four brothers of Providence's prominent Brown family all dabbled in the trade, but following the disastrous voyage of the *Sally*, Moses, Nicholas, and Joseph Brown never invested in a slaving voyage again, and Moses went on to become one of the most outspoken abolitionists in the Northeast. Providence in fact abandoned the trade early, relative to the rest of Rhode Island, under only slight pressure from the abolitionist movement.



Illustration from an eighteenth-century newspaper. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 458).

Other towns were far more dependent on the slave trade. This was particularly true in Bristol and Warren, where the local economy was traditionally linked to the towns' well-sheltered waterways. Many of the young men in these towns were employed in the slave trade as seamen or as laborers in the distilleries or on the docks. The trade largely supported two of Bristol's most prominent families, the DeWolfs and the Potters (those members of the two families who shunned the trade found themselves considerably less wealthy than their brothers and sisters). In the case of Warren and Bristol, slave traders probably had a strong argument in claiming their dependence on the trade.



Until the 1760s there appears to have been very little objection in the American colonies to the buying and selling of slaves. Although there very well may have been individuals or small groups that objected to the practice, they were not

sufficiently organized or vocal to bring about any significant changes. Even the ardently abolitionist Society of Friends permitted ownership of slaves by their members as late as 1770.⁵

What may have been the earliest legal decision to question the constitutionality of the slave trade and affect the American colonies occurred in England in 1772. The case of *Somerset v. Stewart* stated that a master could not seize and detain a slave prior to sale elsewhere, and habeas corpus was available to slaves to prevent this from occurring.⁶ While *Somerset* was applicable only in England, it affected opinion in the colonies as well. Like the ideas of the American Revolution, it questioned the morality of slave ownership everywhere. For those opposed to slavery, the *Somerset* decision proved what many had believed for years: that slavery was in violation of “natural law” or the law of God. This decision opened the way for more concrete antislavery legislation, applicable solely to the colonies.⁷

The movement to abolish the slave trade began in earnest shortly before the American Revolution. This was no coincidence; the ideas of the Revolution were instrumental in forcing the colonists to question the morality of owning other human beings. In a time suffused with a belief in political equality and personal freedom for all men—a belief that would be forcefully expressed in the Declaration of Independence—some Americans who supported the slave trade may have felt that they were violating their principles with that support. As more and more Americans recognized the uncomfortable contradiction between the ideals of equality and freedom and the practice of slaveholding, abolitionist societies and petitions for laws against the trade began to appear through the colonies.

The beginning of what might be considered the nation’s antislavery legislation occurred in 1774, when the First Continental Congress ordered the slave trade discontinued. Most Rhode Island merchants honored this law and withdrew from the trade.⁸ With the law still in effect, the postwar revival of slave trafficking, which was much more substantial than the prewar activity, was thus completely illegal. Also in 1774 the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law declaring that no slave was to be brought into Rhode Island unless he or she could not be disposed of in the West Indies.⁹ Because of its qualification the law proved totally ineffectual.

In 1784 the General Assembly passed an act calling for modified manumission, under which all children born to slave mothers after 1 March 1784 were to be considered free; the children were to be supported by the towns where they lived, with the town councils having the authority to indenture the children as apprentices or to make other arrangements for their upkeep.¹⁰ This law required no real sacrifice on the part of slave owners, and it did nothing to curb the actual trade in slaves. Still it is possible that some considered the law a moral victory of sorts, for owning longtime slaves was regarded as more honorable than introducing people into slavery.

In 1787 the Assembly enacted a law prohibiting all citizens and residents of Rhode Island from participating in the slave trade. A federal statute of 1794 forbade United States citizens and resident foreigners from fitting out vessels at American ports for participating in the foreign slave trade (i.e., from Africa to the West Indies); when the statute proved difficult to enforce,¹¹ it was strengthened by a subsequent act in 1800. But these measures merely paid lip service to

TO BE SOLD, by
JOHN LYON,
At REHOBOTH:
TWENTY-THREE fine healthy young Slaves, just arrived from the Coast of Africa.—For Directions and further Information, apply to WILLIAM PROUD, in Providence.

Advertisement in the Providence Gazette and Country Journal, 11 June 1763. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 2769).

the demands of the abolitionists. Slave trading continued in Rhode Island in defiance of the law, with insurance companies underwriting slaving voyages as late as May 1800. A contributor to the *Providence Gazette* of 11 July 1789 recounted an instance of such illegal trafficking:

Within two or three weeks last past arrived in the eastern passage of Rhode Island, and came to anchor, the brig [], Daniel Gardner, Captain, owned by Samuel Brown, of Boston, and William Vernon, of Newport, from the West-Indies, where she had discharged a cargo of upwards of two hundred of the black people from Africa, and consigned them all to the horrors of perpetual slavery. After some time waiting for orders, this brig, without breaking bulk, weighed anchor, took a turn through Bristol ferry, and sailed for New York. It is conjectured that she is to continue in this same "disgraceful traffic."

Although state and federal legislation did make it increasingly difficult for merchants to continue in the trade and forced more of them to desert it each year, such legislation certainly did not end slave trading by Rhode Islanders. Ironically, and to the dismay of abolitionists, the trade in fact became more profitable after the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. This happened mainly because the constitutional clause permitting the importation of slaves to American ports was to expire in 1808, and it was widely suspected that the trade would be banned once and for all as of 1 January of that year.

Three years before the expiration of the clause the demand for slaves increased so dramatically that traders were barely able to keep up with the market. Indeed, the busiest year in the history of the trade for Rhode Island slavers was 1805—a full eighteen years after it became illegal for Rhode Island citizens to participate in the trade. That year slaving voyages accounted for a full 10 percent of all clearances at Rhode Island customhouses.¹² In addition, the increase in the demand for slaves was accompanied by an increase in profits, for as the trade fell out of favor with most merchants, those who continued in it enjoyed a larger share of the market. Thus, although abolitionists saw considerable popular support for their cause during this time, Africans were still being brought into slavery in great numbers, and at tremendous economic benefit to the merchants responsible for the traffic.



While the general population long remained divided on the morality of selling and owning slaves, one group united before all others in their objection to slavery. The Society of Friends, or Quakers, recognized early on that enslaving other human beings was inconsistent with the basic beliefs of their faith. The Quakers' charity and benevolence, which had already been directed towards American Indians before the middle of the eighteenth century, thereupon broadened to include good will towards enslaved and freed Africans. Many Quakers of the time had owned slaves, and thus in many ways their opposition to slavery was more of a moral awakening than an expression of long-held beliefs. Even so, these Quakers recognized the need for freeing the slaves nearly a hundred years before the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil War decided the issue conclusively.

Throughout the Northeast in the late eighteenth century, to be a Quaker was to be an abolitionist. Fundamental in this regard was the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light, a principle that can best be described as divine inspiration: the Quakers believed that there was a spiritual essence within each individual that

could guide his or her actions along a moral, God-loving path. Since slavery was in contempt of God's law, a true Quaker, filled with the Inner Light, could have no part of it.¹³ (The Inner Light affected all facets of Quaker morality, including its view of alcohol, which was frowned upon. Interestingly, a 1774 pamphlet by Quaker Anthony Benezet, *The Mighty Destroyer Displayed*, linked alcohol to slavery, as both contributed to moral callousness.)¹⁴

The Quakers opposed the continuing slave trade energetically, attacking every aspect of the "evil institution." They recognized the need to begin with efforts to prevent importation and then to work to prevent the buying and selling of the slaves already imported. The latter task proved by far the more difficult, and the Quakers had very little influence in the South, where they were thought of as religious zealots. From 1783, when the slave trade resumed with the end of the Revolution, they fought on determinedly, and their efforts were rewarded with significant successes. In Rhode Island the manumission act of 1784 followed strenuous Quaker campaigning and petitioning.¹⁵ Beginning in 1787, Quakers in Rhode Island and other northeastern states initiated efforts to outlaw the outfitting of vessels for the Guinea trade, and such laws were in effect by 1789.

"Truth Shall Make You Free." Engraving from
The Envoy from Free Hearts to the Free
(Pawtucket: Juvenile Eman Society, 1840).
RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6716).



After 1792 the Quakers found their fight increasingly difficult, for slavery was becoming increasingly popular in the South. Since their energies were concentrated in the North, the focus was on efforts to better the lot of former slaves there rather than on the issue of slave ownership. As in their earlier work with American Indians, many Quakers devoted themselves to teaching literacy and Christianity to former slaves. These acts of good will were a basic part of Quaker religious doctrine, for the Quakers believed that a love of mankind and an unself-conscious dedication to benevolent acts brought them closer to God and inner peace. John Woolman, a dedicated Quaker who was adamantly opposed to slavery in any form, felt that Quakers "might be faithful to the Lord while His mercies are yet extended to [them], and so attend to pure Universal Righteousness as to give no just cause of offence to the gentiles who do not profess Christianity, Whither [*sic*] the Blacks from Africa, or the Native Inhabitants of this Continent."¹⁶ This sense of humanitarianism was common to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Quakers, who believed that nothing could bring greater happiness than universal benevolence towards all men.

As a Quaker, Woolman was perhaps the prime embodiment of the doctrine of the Inner Light and the spirit of universal benevolence. He was truly and deeply saddened by slavery, unlike some Quakers who had owned slaves in the past and had given them up only reluctantly to avoid excommunication. Woolman believed that slavery, "as a flagrant violation of the divinely ordained brotherhood of man, might bring God's wrath down on Friends for tolerating it."¹⁷ Rather than speaking out loudly against slavery, however, Woolman chose to oppose it in a quiet but determined way, going so far as to refuse to enter the homes of acquaintances who owned slaves. Although he did not suggest that blacks become full members of Quaker congregations, he did believe in teaching Christian doctrine to the slaves, with the idea that they be freed after they had completed their studies. By promoting education and discouraging tolerance of slavery, Woolman helped to popularize the abhorrent image that slavery eventually acquired in the North.



Moses Brown had not always been opposed to slavery, but he eventually became as adamantly abolitionist as Woolman was. The youngest of the four Brown brothers, Moses was involved with the family business for much of his life. Although never as ambitious as his brothers Nicholas and John, he was nonetheless a shrewd businessman. Following the death of his wife in 1773, however, his life took a new and highly spiritual direction; he released all of his slaves, joined the Quakers, and turned his attention to battling the institution of slavery. In February 1789 he helped to found the Providence Society for Abolishing the Slave Trade.¹⁸ Ironically, while his brother John became one of the most outspoken supporters of the Guinea trade in Rhode Island, it was Moses, along with the Reverend Samuel Hopkins of Newport, who became known as one of the opposition's most distinguished leaders.¹⁹

Although John and Moses Brown managed to remain close in spite of their conflicting positions on the slave trade, their respective sides became engaged in an impassioned debate that set the two brothers against each other in a public forum. This came about in a series of letters written to the *Providence Gazette* in 1789. As in other newspapers of the time, much of the *Gazette* consisted of contributions from the local population. Contributors rarely signed their

[1789]
A-1153

CONSTITUTION of the PROVIDENCE SOCIETY for abolishing the SLAVE-TRADE.

IT having pleased the Creator of mankind to make of one blood all nations of men, and having, by the diffusion of his light, manifested that, however diversified by colour, situation, religion, or different states of society, it becomes them to consult and promote each other's happiness, as members of one great family: It is therefore the duty of those who profess to maintain their own rights, and especially those who acknowledge the obligations of Christianity, to extend, by the use of such means as are or may be in their power, the blessings of freedom to the whole human race; and in a more particular manner to such of their fellow-creatures as by the laws and constitutions of the United States are entitled to their freedom, and who by fraud or violence are or may be detained in bondage. And as, by the African slave-trade, a system of slavery, replete with human misery, is erected and carried on, it is incumbent on them to endeavour the suppression of that unrighteous commerce; to excite a due observance of such good and wholesome laws as are or may be enacted for the abolition of slavery, and for the support of the rights of those who are entitled to freedom by the laws of the country in which they live; and to afford such relief as we may be enabled to those unhappy fellow-citizens, who, like the sons of Africa, falling into the hands of unmerciful men, may be carried into slavery at Algiers or elsewhere.

From a conviction of these truths, and the obligation of these principles, and from a desire to diffuse them wherever the vices and miseries of slavery exist, and in humble reliance on the favour and support of the Father of mankind, the subscribers have formed themselves into a Society, under the title of *The Providence Society for abolishing the Slave-Trade*.—For effecting these purposes, they have adopted the following rules:

1st. The Society shall elect, by a majority of votes to be taken by ballot, a President, a Vice-President, one or more Counsellors, a Secretary, and a Treasurer, who shall respectively continue in office for one year from the time of their election, and at the expiration of every year succeeding, there shall be a new election of officers in the same manner.

2d. The President shall have authority to maintain order and decorum at the meetings of the Society, and to call a special meeting at any time, with the advice of three of the Standing Committee herein after named.

3d. The Vice-President, in the absence of the President, shall have the same authority as the President; and in case the President shall die or be displaced, the Vice-President shall officiate until a new President be chosen.

4th. The Secretary shall keep a record of the proceedings of the Society, in a book to be provided for that purpose, and shall cause to be published, from time to time, such part of the proceedings, or resolutions, as the Society may order, or the President with the Standing Committee between the meetings of the Society may think proper to direct.

5th. The Treasurer, if required by the Society, shall give security for the faithful discharge of the trust reposed in him, and shall keep regular accounts of the monies received and paid, observing always to pay no money without an order signed by the President, or a majority of a quorum of the Standing Committee, who are prohibited from drawing, between the stated meetings of

the Society, for a larger sum than ten pounds, unless especially empowered by the Society at a previous meeting.

6th. If any of the officers above named shall resign or be displaced, the Society shall fill the vacancy in the mode prescribed by the first article; and if the President and Vice-President, or Secretary, or Treasurer, be absent at any of the meetings, the Society may elect one to officiate *pro tempore*.

7th. The Society shall meet once in every quarter, that is to say, on the 3d sixth day in the 2d, 5th, 8th and 11th months in every year, at such place as shall from time to time be agreed upon, in order to receive the reports of the Standing Committee, and devise the ways and means of accomplishing the objects of this institution.

8th. That nine members, with a President or Vice-President, constitutionally assembled, be a quorum of the Society for transacting business.

9th. Every member after subscribing these rules shall pay into the hands of the Treasurer two-thirds of a dollar, and at the commencement of every quarter one-sixth of a dollar; and all donations to the Society shall be made through the President, who shall pay them to the Treasurer, and report them to the Society at the next quarterly-meeting.

10th. Any citizen of the United States, who shall be recommended by two-thirds of the Standing Committee to a quarterly-meeting, shall be balloted for, and if approved by two-thirds of the members present, he shall be declared a member. The Committee of seven shall have authority to receive such members as may offer and subscribe before the next quarterly-meeting, this rule notwithstanding.

11th. Two-thirds of the members present at a quarterly-meeting shall have power to expel any person whom they may deem unworthy of remaining a member, and no person shall be a member who holds a slave, or is concerned in the slave-trade.

12th. It shall be the business of the Counsellors to explain the laws and constitutions of the States, which relate to the emancipation of slaves, and to the slave-trade. And, when it becomes necessary, to urge the due execution thereof, and their claims to freedom, before such persons or Courts as are or may be authorized to decide on the same.

13th. A Standing Committee of seven members shall be appointed to transact the business in general, four of whom are empowered to act; whose duty it shall be to take the most effectual measures to accomplish the objects of this institution, agreeable to the direction and at the expence of the Society, and to report a particular account of their proceedings at the next quarterly-meeting, at which time two of their number shall be released from the service, in the order their names stand on the minutes, and the vacancy filled up by the same or two others appointed in their room, and in like manner a dismissal and appointment of two shall take place at each succeeding quarterly-meeting.

14th. The foregoing Rules shall be in force without alteration six months, after which period they shall be subject to such alterations as two-thirds of the members present, at a quarterly-meeting, shall agree upon.

names; instead, they used pseudonyms, a device that only thinly concealed their identities in the Providence of the 1780s. This limited anonymity allowed contributors to follow up their contributions with supportive letters signed with other pseudonyms—a favorite tactic of John Brown's, though it did not fool his brother Moses at all.

John Brown commenced his attack on Saturday, 14 February 1789, when he accused the newly formed Providence abolition society of attempting to ruin solid citizens. At this time he was one of the few Providence merchants, if not the only one, still engaged in the slave trade, and it seems clear that he was the citizen he was concerned about when he wrote that

there is a society forming at the Friends' meeting-house here, to promote the abolition of the Slavery of the Africans, and other commerce carried on in Slaves. Every new Society, . . . that may be formed, the public may expect will appear with the most specious pretenses of public good. . . . But I confess the appearance of the conduct of the Friends shews too plainly to me, that this association is really a combination (for it deserves no better epithet) to put in execution their threats against a gentleman of this town, now absent on his business, that unless he quitted the Guinea trade, which to them appeared very bad, there were a number determined at all events to prosecute him to the last extremity, till his utter ruin should be effected.

He then went on to construct a defense of the trade:

Every one seems to have been designed for some purpose or other for which he is fitted; and as it is, I believe, universally agreed, that the agriculture of the West India islands must have an annual supply of laborers, over and above their natural increase, the deaths of the laborers there exceeding the births on an average at any given time, how are the islands to be supplied? Will it be a satisfaction to the Friends to have the Negroes put to death by their conquerors, in the wars of Africa? This is always the case, where there are no purchasers, and of course the deficiency of the laborers of the West India islands must be made up of white people; but from what country, the Friends will do well to point out.

In an effort to conceal his identity, John Brown signed himself "A Citizen." When his letter was answered by "A Foe to Oppression" in the 19 February issue of another Providence newspaper, the *United States Chronicle*, John Brown published a rebuttal in the 28 February *Gazette*, in which he requested a truce—"Do not let us devour one another, because we cannot see eye to eye in this business"—but then resumed his attack, accusing the abolitionists of filling "the papers with every kind of stigma that they or their associates could invent, against those who would not subscribe to their creed." He went on to defend the traders themselves:

Among the many disagreeable epithets given the slave-trader, none have been more common than Negro-dealers, kidnappers, etc., etc. which have several times caused my looking round, and comparing the general character of all those heretofore concerned in the slave-trade, with that of those who so violently oppose it. When I find the very best men in Newport and other parts of the State have been concerned, and not above one instance of any altering their testimonies respecting the trade, I cannot suppose it possible that even they themselves who oppose the trade so much, can be put in competition as good citizens of this and the United States.

From John Brown's point of view, "the very best men" of Rhode Island were the wealthy businessmen, many of whom had interests in the slave trade at one time or another. His high opinion of these men is not surprising, given his belief that wealth and power were a measure of a person's overall quality and character.

The letter became less rational and more aggressive as it went on. Toward the end the author went so far as to accuse the abolitionists of stealing, on the grounds that encouraging slaves to run away was as bad as actually removing

them forcibly from their owners. "You must first make it unlawful to ho [slaves], as you have to export them from Guinea," declared Brown angrily. "Pray Messrs., Counsellors, how can you tower away in your famous co tion, and declare those [who encourage slaves to run away] free from the and constitution of the United States?"

Also in the *Gazette* of 28 February was a letter from "A Friend to Reason" who stood firmly in the middle on the slavery issue: "Fanatics in religion politics are equally absurd," claimed the author, and "every being that ac the station Heaven hath placed him, best promotes the general felicity." T on 7 March, the *Gazette* carried a very different sort of letter, a powerful tal to John Brown's "Citizen" correspondence.

Signed "A Friend Though a Monitor to the Citizen," this letter briefly spo the need to answer Citizen's arguments and wasted no time in doing so, at ing their author in the process. The letter accused Citizen of seeming "ang with his own inability to bring about his wishes, as well as with those who etly, without consulting the Citizen (which indeed is their only crime respec him, if that be one) pursued the benevolent purpose of forming that institu [the Providence abolition society]." The author went on to essentially accu Citizen, and others like him, of being selfish, ignorant, and pitiful. Respon to Citizen's reference to the shortage of laborers that would occur in the W Indies if the slave trade were abolished, the author argued that there would no net loss of productivity, since free men are far more productive than slav As for the assertion "that the Negroes are always put to death in the wars o Africa," Citizen's mistaken belief "must be owing to his want of historical knowledge of facts; but if this were true, and he would plead that it was an of humanity to save their lives, would it not be greater to give them their libe with their lives?"

"A Friend Though a Monitor to the Citizen" was Moses Brown. In a privat letter to John Brown dated just two days after Moses's first contribution to *Gazette* debate, Moses let John know his pen name, and he informed him th he was aware that John was writing as "A Citizen." Moses also told his brot that he "hoped thou wilt Candidly Consider that a Continuance of the Dispu can add nothing to thy or any's advantage," and that the printer of the *Providence Gazette* had expressed "his Dislike of the Citizen but he could no Refuse printing [his letters] and Wished people would write less pointedly or to this purpose."²⁰

The next two contributions to the *Gazette* regarding the slave trade were from John Brown, still writing as the Citizen. He was clearly frustrated by his brot er's able responses to his arguments, and his letters were increasingly angry an intemperate. His letter to the *Gazette* of 14 March began with another com- plaint about the abolitionists' derogation of slave traders. Then, telling the story of five slaves who had fled from his house, he managed to seem somewh more humane.

They were all well clothed when they went off. Two of them became so miserable and naked, and not having faculty to get employment, that I really felt for the poor fellows, and happening to be in Boston, I took them to a [shop], and clothed them, telling them at the same time, that they might return again to my house, if they might behave well. . . . Another of them . . . returned home of his own accord, the fourth having his wife in Boston, I have thought best to let him remain there; but the fifth . . . went to Virginia and was hanged there for house-breaking.

The same issue of the *Gazette* also included another letter directed against “A Friend Though a Monitor to the Citizen,” this one signed “A Citizen and True Federalist.” Although it cannot be said for certain that this was more of John Brown’s handiwork, the opening paragraph was written in a familiar voice: “When constant high crimes and misdemeanors are charged on the fair trader, it would be strange indeed, if some good citizen did not step forward to defend the innocent, especially at a time when such deep plots and combinations are forming to oppress the already too much oppressed.”

This letter may very well have been written by John Brown, fabricating another contributor to support his position. Overall, public sentiment at the time favored the cause of abolition, and abolitionists apparently found it less important than their opponents did to argue their case in the pages of the *Providence Gazette*; in fact, John Brown himself contributed to the *Gazette* nearly three times as often as the abolitionists did during this time. There was a great deal of money to be made in the traffic in slaves, and although he was already extremely wealthy, he was anxious to preserve what he saw as his right to continue his interests in the trade.

By the middle of March 1789 the two sides had made all their points repeatedly, but Citizen still continued his contributions to the *Gazette*, and Moses Brown continued his replies. In the 21 March issue Moses began signing his letters “M.B.,” and in April, shortly before the last of their letters appeared, John began to sign his full name (in one of these letters John referred to Citizen without acknowledging that writer’s identity). The two brothers remained close in spite of their heated disagreement on the slavery issue; in fact, they were still rehashing it eight years later in personal correspondence. In a letter dated 24 March 1797, Moses told John that he was

Sorry that thou should say one word Attempting the Vindication of a Traffick in our fellow Man and [illegible] had thou given thy self time to have read & looked into the subject the [illegible] of making Slaves [illegible] of the Africans to save their lives would be mentioned [illegible] to justify the practice, but as thou yet hold that idea [illegible] I will suppose it for a Moment to be possible that if they were all left in Africa some few of them might be Slain, Will any Slave Trader, can any One put his hand on his heart and say Send for these poor Wretches to Save their Lives and not for the Love of gain or to answer my other Views, and there fore I am Conscience bound in what I do in the Business for their Safety.²¹

As it turned out, in 1797 John Brown became the first Rhode Island resident to face prosecution by the Providence Society for Abolishing the Slave Trade, which served as the unofficial authority in charge of prosecuting those who violated laws restricting the slave trade. This event prompted John to defend himself in a number of letters to Moses and other prominent local citizens. Given what we know about his ongoing involvement in the slave trade, these letters—in which John pleads his innocence and swears once again that he will have no more to do with the trade—appear almost amusing. In a letter to Welcome Arnold, John declared that he was

Sorry to have Ocation of Adviseing you how much your Brother is Indeivering to Injure the Town to which both you & he belongs I Mean In his Invitterate Prossicutions Against Mr. Sterry and MySelf—both you & he knows that I am not in the Guina Trade nor have beene Concernd but in One Voyage while Others of Several Other Towns have beene Concernd in Maney Voyages. . . . is it Good Pollicey for the Citicons of this place to be prossicuteing their Neighbors who are not in the Trade While Others of Warrin, Bristol, Newport &c. &c. who are Driving the Trade are Sufferd to be Unmolested.²²

Speaking of the legal proceedings against him in a letter to his son James, John was angry and aggressive: “the Further they proceed the more the people in General are against this Wicked and abominable Combination I mean the Abolition Society. The Committee for the Society are very busy Running Round in the Rain to Get their Council together to conclude on their Further prosecutions. I tell them they had better be Contented to Stop ware they are, as the Further they go the wors they will fail.”²³

In a letter to Moses, John portrayed himself as a grievously wronged martyr. “I do now Accordingly call on you as my Brother & an officer to the Society which is so Crewelly & Vindictively prosecuting me for One Offence tho I have so Frequently Declaired that I would not again be Concerned in the trade. If we Forgive not how can we Expect to be forgiven.” The society, he insisted, was attempting “to Destroy Your Brother, who has sufficient Trouble from the State of the Times & other circumstances, besides these Unkind Proseccutions.”

Despite their strong differences, John did gain Moses’s support in defending himself against the society’s prosecution, and although his ship *Hope* was confiscated, he was acquitted of all criminal charges.²⁵ It is likely, however, that the strain of the proceedings was a significant deterrent; while his support of the trade did not diminish, he probably never invested or participated in a slave voyage again. At the same time, his advancing age caused him to retire from most of his trading ventures: “my Inactivity is a Sufficient Reason for my Dropping the Idea of Ever Fitting out more Ships. . . . ad to this the State of my Family haveing no one in the least Acquainted with Mercantile Business.”²⁶



Another slave trader adept at avoiding legal retribution was Bristol merchant Charles DeWolf. In 1799, when his ship *Lucy* was impounded for participation in the slave trade, DeWolf, along with his brother James and John Brown, devised a plan to prevent the sale of the vessel at public auction. Usually the DeWolfs would have had no trouble outbidding everyone else at such an auction, as very few people would bid against powerful merchants in these circumstances. In this case, however, the United States government was sending an agent to bid on its behalf. This agent was Samuel Bosworth, customs surveyor for the port of Bristol. Bosworth recounted the incident in a letter to Rhode Island governor Arthur Fenner:

On my Way to attend the Sale of the Schooner *Lucy*, condemned for a breach of the Law prohibiting the Traffic in Slaves . . . Mr. John Brown of Providence, Messrs James D’Wolf & Charles D’Wolf . . . severely urged my declining the appointment to attend the sale offering that it was not in the line of my duty, and that I should be considered as a Volunteer in a Business which I know to be very obnoxious to my fellow citizens. I told them that I should certainly [follow] the orders I had received. . . . Ten oclock or a few minutes before, this being the hour appointed for the sale of the *Lucy*, I set out from my house . . . to attend said Sale, not in the least expecting any Interruption or molestation on the way. [After] I had got about two thirds of the way . . . I was forcibly seized & carried on Board of a small sail Boat, lying close by the Street. I struggled, resisted & exclaimed for Help but in vain; there were several people in sight at the Time, . . . but . . . afforded me no assistance.²⁷

Bosworth was taken to Mount Hope and released. Meanwhile, at the auction the DeWolfs made a brief show of bidding for the *Lucy* against one of their own captains, who was then allowed to make the purchase on their behalf. It was only this an embarrassment for the government, but it essentially invali-

dated the use of forfeiture as a deterrent to the slave trade, for while forfeiture might put an occasional trader out of business, the *Lucy* episode demonstrated how ineffective that tactic was against major traders like the DeWolfs.²⁸ Bosworth's last sentence quoted above also suggests that in Bristol, at least, local people may have been sympathetic to the slave traders, who had significant interests in other of the town's businesses.

Antislavery legislation during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a confusing jumble of laws that were passed and then ignored. In the face of determined opposition, enforcement was difficult. Maritime law was in effect dictated by whoever owned the most ships, and more often than not this was the wealthy merchant class. The authority of the law could often carry less weight than the desire for profit, and as long as the slave trade remained lucrative, the paltry fines levied for breaking the law had little deterrent effect. Furthermore, there were always customhouse officials who were willing to look the other way if it served their personal interests. One notable example of such an official was Charles Collins, who succeeded Jonathan Russell as collector of customs at Bristol in 1804 and served in that office until 1820.

Russell was a law-abiding man who took his position as collector quite seriously. He was nonetheless summarily dismissed in 1804 and replaced by Collins, a brother-in-law of the notorious slave trader James DeWolf, after the DeWolfs used their considerable influence in Washington to petition President Jefferson to make that change. Frustrated and angry, Russell wrote to Jefferson requesting an explanation. "It is my duty to state that you must have been deceived in respect to the character and qualifications of my successor," he wrote in one draft of this letter. "Some of those who have advised to Mr. Collins' appointment, have suppressed or withheld that information concerning him, which it is their duty to have given. Do not think Sir that I am complaining of my removal. I do not." But he went on to say that he did not know how he had failed in his duty; his only interest had been in the public welfare and the execution of the laws of the land. He therefore believed that "Mr. Collins ought not to have been appointed the Collector. . . . He has been bred and brot up from his youth in the Slave Trade, he has commanded in 9/10ths of the voyages he has performed, vessles employed in this trafic, and the quarter part of them, since it was prohibited by the United States."²⁹

"My offense has been that I voted against James D'Wolfe as representative for the Town," declared Russell. "This I did & always shall do, apart from all political considerations. Surely it cannot offend the Government of the U.S. that I withhold my suffrage from a man who is constantly violating their laws—" Added to the last sentence was an angry interlinear parenthesis: "(he & he alone effected my removal, it originated with him)." Russell's letter continued for three more pages, with numerous examples of Collins's interest in the slave trade and of questionable business that Collins may have been involved in with the DeWolf family, before concluding on a foreboding note: "Sir," Russell told the president, "I hazzard my personal safety in giving you this information."

Despite the letter, Collins's appointment was not rescinded. Russell's misfortune was good fortune for Collins and the DeWolfs. From 1804 to 1807 state and federal orders to prosecute and fine slave traders were ignored at Bristol; the number of ships leaving that port for Africa soared, as Collins "pursued an egalitarian policy of obstructionism toward all the trade's critics."³⁰ Indeed, with the influence of the slave traders reaching into the highest levels of gov-

ernment, it seems surprising that the abolitionists were able to accomplish as much as they did.



Bristol's slave traders seemed to be in a strong and secure position at the turn of the century. Although the trade had been illegal for Rhode Islanders since 1787, in reality it had never been more flourishing. With Charles Collins's appointment to the customhouse at Bristol in 1804, it may well have seemed that the illegal trade would be able to continue unchecked. The government's only attempt to impose its control in Bristol—the impounding and auctioning off of the *Lucy*—had ended in disaster. For how long, then, did the DeWolfs and others actually continue to trade in slaves?

According to official records, the trade virtually ceased at Bristol, the state's last slave-trading port, when the constitutional clause protecting it expired at the end of 1807 and a federal statute banning the importation of slaves into the United States took effect at the beginning of 1808. After 1 January 1808 Africa all but vanished from Charles Collins's customhouse records, replaced by Caribbean and West Indies destinations. If these records tell the whole story, and the Rhode Island slave trade did essentially end at the beginning of 1808, we may assume that the traders held federal antislaving legislation in higher regard than similar state legislation, and that may indeed have been the case. Still, it is difficult to believe that these men simply abandoned the trade, since it would appear that their situation was such that they were virtually immune to prosecution. Moses Brown, who continued to keep track of alleged slaving activities, named James and Charles DeWolf as active slavers as late as 1811. Other sources, however, say that James quit the trade in 1808.³¹

Although it was illegal for U.S. citizens to trade in slaves in any country, the increased traffic to Cuba and the West Indies suggests that the trade may have continued outside the United States. The nature of the trade route could allow an American merchant to outfit a slaver outside the country, make a run or two down the African coast, and then sell his ship along with his cargo in Cuba or the West Indies. Indeed, Havana—where the DeWolfs owned a large sugar plantation—reported the entry of 235 slaves between 1810 and 1820.³²

At any rate, Rhode Island slavers were certainly not involved after 1820, when, among other things, President Monroe refused to reappoint Charles Collins as collector at Bristol. Collins was replaced by Barnabas Bates, an ardent abolitionist.³³ That year also saw the passage of a federal act that made slave trading a crime punishable by the death penalty. Importing slaves had always been a risky venture, but the threat of the gallows appears to have been the final deterrent for the Rhode Island traders. At last influenced by the law and the evolution of society's moral sensibilities, the importation of slaves ceased to be a viable commercial activity; and with Rhode Island merchants shunning that unrighteous traffic, the slave trade faded to an infamous chapter in American history.

Notes

1. Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 21.
2. James B. Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: The Colonial Years* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 79-80.
3. Deposition, 2 Oct. 1794, DeWolf papers, vol. 1, Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS).
4. Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 25.
5. Sydney V. James, *A People among Peoples: Quaker Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 220.
6. Alan Watson, *Slave Law in the Americas* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 122.
7. William M. Wiecek, *The Sources of Antislavery Constitutionalism in America, 1760-1848* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 20.
8. Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle*, 31.
9. Hedges, *Browns of Providence Plantations*, 82.
10. *At the General Assembly of the Governor and Company of the State of Rhode-Island . . .*, February 1784 (Providence, n.d.), 6-7; W. E. B. DuBois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* (Williamstown, Mass.: Corner House Publications, 1970), 226.
11. DuBois, *Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, 237.
12. Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle*, 18.
13. James, *People among Peoples*, 95.
14. *Ibid.*, 255.
15. *Ibid.*, 296.
16. *Ibid.*, 323.
17. *Ibid.*, 132.
18. Hedges, *Browns of Providence Plantations*, 17.
19. *Ibid.*, 82.
20. Moses Brown to John Brown, 9 Mar. 1789, Moses Brown Papers, RIHS.
21. Moses Brown to John Brown, 24 Mar. 1797, Moses Brown Papers.
22. John Brown to Welcome Arnold, 15 June 1797, Peck Papers, 10:62, RIHS.
23. John Brown to James Brown, 21 June 1798, John Brown Papers, 1:170, RIHS.
24. John Brown to Moses Brown, 29 July 1797, Moses Brown Papers.
25. Hedges, *Browns of Providence Plantations*, 83.
26. John Brown to Henry Smith, 20 Jan. 1798, Peck Papers, 11:1.
27. Samuel Bosworth to Arthur Fenner, July 1799, Shepley Papers, 9:8, RIHS.
28. Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle*, 218.
29. Jonathan Russell to Thomas Jefferson, 17 Mar. 1804, Shepley Papers, 9:7.
30. Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle*, 227.
31. *Ibid.*, 235.
32. *Ibid.*, 233.
33. *Ibid.*, 235.



“Every Shout a Cannon Ball”: The IWW and Urban Disorders in Providence, 1912-1914

JOSEPH W. SULLIVAN

In the late summer of 1914 Providence experienced its worst rioting in more than eighty years. Frustrated over high prices at a time of high unemployment, immigrant workers clashed with police in pitched battles in the streets of the city's Federal Hill section. These disorders, which came to be known as the Macaroni Riots, were the climax of two years of vigorous organizing efforts by the Industrial Workers of the World.

The IWW had already been active in America for several years when it burst upon the New England scene in January 1912 with a spectacularly successful strike against the textile giants of Lawrence, Massachusetts. Over twenty-five thousand strikers, representing a dozen ethnic groups, demonstrated peaceful solidarity for months in the face of official repression and their own traditional differences. The supposedly diffident, superstitious peasants of Lawrence shocked the ruling classes with their belligerence toward scabs, militia, police, and clerics. Thousands of normally pious workers marched in a giant parade featuring a placard reading “No God, No Master.” Though some strikers could not resist hurling a stone or menacing a scab, most of the violence that occurred was perpetrated by the social servants of the textile industry in their attempts to break the strike. But far from demoralizing the strikers, the shooting of pickets and the clubbing of women and children served only to steel the strikers' resolve.

Leading the Lawrence strike, along with local figures such as Joseph Caruso, were national organizer Joseph Ettor, western mine workers' hero “Big Bill” Haywood, and poet-anarchist Arturo Giovannitti. Eschewing violence (“Bayonets cannot weave cloth,” said Ettor), Giovannitti, an immensely popular figure among Italian workers, nevertheless captured the power of mass action in his poetry:

The Mob, the mightiest judge of all,
to hear the Rights of Man came out,
and every word became a shout,
and every shout a cannon ball.”¹

Before the strike was over, Caruso, Ettor, and Giovannitti were arrested and charged with the murder of a young striker who had actually been shot by a Lawrence policeman. The arrest of the three men sparked protests throughout the United States, especially in New England, and agitation and tension continued to build as their 24 September trial date neared.



The events in Lawrence cast a long shadow in Rhode Island, where the triumph of the IWW-led strikers over the formidable power of a textile mogul like William Wood caught the attention of similarly suffering unorganized laborers. It was such workers, ignored by the skilled members of the American Federation of Labor, that the IWW typically organized. For the foreign-born unenfran-

chised miner, farm worker, and factory operative, the Industrial Workers of the World was the sole voice.

The IWW had in fact been organizing in Rhode Island mills even before the Lawrence strike began. On 3 January 1912 over a hundred workers from the Esmond Blanket Mill in Lincoln gathered at a mass meeting at Centerdale and decided to organize. Shunning the AF of L's textile union for its casual indifference to immigrant workers, a delegation from the mill turned to Thomas Powers and James P. Reid of the IWW-affiliated National Union of Textile Workers for leadership, and a local of the IWW was formed by 187 men, women, and children workers. Within a single day Esmond's management caved in and offered their operatives a 5 to 10 percent wage increase. But the workers were back on the picket line within weeks when the mill's superintendent brazenly rescinded the wage increases. As the workers filed out of the plant, some employees sabotaged machinery and broke windows. Eventually management again bowed to the union, and the workers returned for a second time.²

The arrest of the three Lawrence strike leaders occasioned an outpouring of concern in Rhode Island. On Sunday, 16 September 1912, the Providence Ettor-Giovanitti-Caruso Defense Committee, composed of IWW members ("Wobblies"), Italian, Polish, and native Socialists, and other interested parties, assembled on Atwells Avenue for a sympathy parade. The procession headed down Knight Street to Broadway and Infantry Hall on South Main Street, where the rally was to be addressed by IWW spellbinder Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Dr. James P. Reid, a Socialist dentist who was serving his historic first and only term in the state House of Representatives, and Italian speakers from New York, including the anarchist Carlo Tresca, Flynn's boyfriend. Led by Wobblies Louis Nimini, a bookkeeper and founder of Federal Hill's Karl Marx Club, and Bernardo Quartaroli, a tailor, the march progressed under a sea of banners and signs proclaiming "Bail and Habeas Corpus Denied Ettor and Giovanitti" and "Justice in Massachusetts." Bringing up the rear of the parade was the Italian Socialist Federation, which displayed a large red flag with a black border.³



Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a noted IWW agitator, addressed a tumultuous labor rally in Providence in September 1912. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8489).

Although it was visible to police on Atwells Avenue, it was not until the parade reached Broadway that Captain Silas L. W. Merrill decided to prohibit the Italians' red flag. Entering the line of march, he ordered flag bearer Domenic Iaci, a barber, to the sidewalk. As Iaci obediently furled his banner, he was pushed back into the march by comrades who ordered him to redisplay the flag. Captain Merrill caught sight of Iaci back in the parade and waded in to arrest him. The parade then dissolved into a melee. Marchers punched, kicked, and stabbed policemen as the cops flailed away with nightsticks. A cascade of rocks and placards greeted the arrival of police reinforcements. Captain Merrill was felled by a club to the head, and Inspector McSoley received a knife wound in the thigh; four patrolmen were surrounded and beaten, and countless demonstrators were injured by police batons. Broadway was speckled with debris and prostrate forms. A crowd of two thousand battled the police for fifteen minutes, and only when police threatened to shoot did the crowd retreat.

As news of the riot spread, the main body of the parade approached Infantry Hall. Patrol wagons raced to South Main Street to head off any further trouble. In the hall the police informed James Reid that only those attendees who could find seats would be allowed to remain. The aisles and the street in front of the hall were cleared of surplus marchers. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, already renowned

as a practiced agitator, aroused (as the *Providence Journal* put it) "intense enthusiasm" as she denounced the police, the capitalists, and the courts of Massachusetts. Reid characterized the persecution of Ettore and Giovannitti as "a blot upon American principles." The Italian-speaking members of the audience were addressed by Nicola Vecchi and Michele di Michele, two New York anarchists. The police stood ready to end the rally should the speeches become too inflammatory. Rather than making arrests, the officers contented themselves with hammering bystanders with nightsticks; the only person arrested was Wladyslaw Maczynicz, a Polish Socialist, who was charged with reveling.⁴

As president of the parade committee, Louis Nimini denounced the "police interference" that had occasioned the fracas. "If the police had any objections to that particular flag, why did they not say so to the marshal" before the procession got under way? he asked. Besides, he added, English-speaking marchers had also displayed red flags but had not been molested, a demonstration of the Providence police's bias against Italians. James Reid denied that red flags had been prohibited as a condition for a parade permit, as alleged by the chief of police. At a reelection campaign rally for Reid in Olneyville the following evening, Massachusetts Socialist Joseph M. Coldwell observed that the only time Socialists were mentioned in the capitalist press was when the police harassed their parades.⁵

But the organ of the Republican party, the *Providence Journal*, saw a larger picture. Bloodshed and riot were "incidental" to the appearance of "that pestilent organization, the Industrial Workers of the World," said the *Journal*, ignoring the fact that the Red Flag Riot had been precipitated by the police. The *Journal* went on to examine strikes per se, concluding that they "imperil life" and "impose suffering chiefly upon the innocent third party—that is, the public." Government employees, public service workers, and "laborers producing the necessities of life" should be prohibited from striking because of "moral considerations." Furthermore, the "disproportion between the injury done by low wages and the injury done by bringing a whole country to the verge of starvation" was deplorable. In the *Journal's* view, the moral considerations of economic risk lay solely within the workers' purview; working people had no right to complain of exploitation and no right to carry a red flag, a symbol of revolution and disloyalty. (The day prior to the Red Flag Riot, the *Journal* and the Rhode Island Militia had observed the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Antietam by welcoming the Richmond Blues, a Virginia militia unit that marched through downtown Providence carrying the symbols of the Confederacy.)⁶



With the country gripped by a worsening depression in 1913, the IWW stepped up its organizing efforts. In February the Wobblies under Bernardo Quartaroli began organizing tailors employed at the various department stores in Providence. Three hundred tailors walked out in a strike, but that action appeared to lack much of the solidarity and verve that usually characterized IWW efforts. The tailors began straggling back to work on a shop-by-shop basis throughout the late winter as Wobbly factions debated whether to accept piecemeal settlements. Whatever revolutionary magic the IWW could conjure among textile workers, it was clear that merchant tailors were not susceptible to it.⁷

To shore up the flagging tailors, Quartaroli, with help from James Reid and others, attempted to organize public demonstrations on behalf of the IWW. On



As a Socialist party candidate, Olneyville dentist James P. Reid was elected to a term in the General Assembly in 1911. Courtesy of Scott Molloy.

31 March 1913 a mass meeting was held at Falstaff Hall on Weybosset Street. Thomas Powers, of the National Union of Textile Workers, Francis Miller, a weaver and recent appointee to the IWW's General Executive Committee, and Michael DeCesare, an organizer, addressed the throng. A decision was made to apply for a parade permit for the following day. When the police refused to issue the permit, the organizers resolved to parade anyhow. On 1 April a small crowd of striking tailors and sympathizers attempted to assemble on Weybosset Street. Patrol wagons and mounted police prevented them from making much headway, and eventually the parade was abandoned. A second procession on Federal Hill was broken up by police with the usual violence. The IWW's frustration grew. When tailor William Katt attempted to return to work, he was beaten by strikers. Two tailors, Benjamin Cicchetti and Paolo Dernico, were arrested for the assault.⁸

Press, pulpit, and politico weighed in against the Wobblies. While the *Journal's* editorial board inveighed against the union, a prominent space was provided for a proclamation by the Reverend Antonio Bove, pastor of St. Ann's Parish in Knightsville and self-appointed guardian of Italian workers. Printed in Italian and English, Father Bove's epistle warned against IWW godlessness and deceit. "The organizers of the IWW are seeking to fool the good honest workmen of this city into striking," declared Bove. "They have no respect for law and are after the money and nothing else. These leaders who shout so much for better wages for working men receive a good weekly wage, live in good houses and have lots of food. Their living depends upon the amount of agitation they can establish." Father Bove, whose own good house and food were provided by the wages of strapped working people, ended his diatribe with a vague offer to "help out" the Italians of the city.⁹

The *Journal* also printed an open letter, titled "What the IWW did to Lawrence," by Michael Scanlon, the mayor of that city and a devoted ally of the American Woolen Company. Mayor Scanlon played up the "No God, No Master" placard and wept over the losses suffered by the mill moguls as a result of the work stoppage. Nowhere in Scanlon's recollection of the Wobbly horrors was there any mention of the militia's shooting of peaceful citizens, the police violence against women and children that had occurred at the Lawrence railway station, or the cache of dynamite that had been planted by local officials working for millowner William Wood.¹⁰

At the State House, Senator Addison Munroe proclaimed that "Rhode Island wants no IWW here" as the state Senate unanimously passed a bill banning the IWW flag from public display. In South Kingstown the town council blithely ignored constitutional constraints as it resolved to ban IWW adherents from the town after a strike threatened the mill at Peace Dale. In Esmond, Wobblies went out on their third strike in sixteen months when management fired the union's bargaining committee. The damage to mill property this time was greater than what it had been during the last two episodes, but with eighteen deputy sheriffs assigned to set up a cordon around the idled plant, the strike proved a failure. But despite the hostility and the setbacks that the Wobblies endured, they could claim a victory when Esmond striker John Greenwood helped James Reid organize the 150 striking yarn workers at the Centerdale Worsted Company into an IWW local. Nevertheless, though the Wobblies were eminently successful at organizing strikes, they repeatedly failed (as they did at Esmond and Centerdale) to sustain their locals after the strikes had ended.¹¹



Rhode Island escaped most of the violence that accompanied radical labor and political activities in the Wilsonian era. The slaughter of women and children in Ludlow, Colorado, and the dynamite attacks, lynchings, and other atrocities that punctuated the labor history of Michigan, Montana, and Utah and assumed the proportions of continuous guerrilla warfare have little parallel in New England.¹² The economic disorders that had been experienced thus far in Rhode Island were typical skirmishes incidental to strikes for higher pay, attempts to organize workers, or, as in the case of the Red Flag Riot, enmity between the police and foreigners who displayed the symbols of revolution. Even the rioting associated with the statewide streetcar strike of 1902, in which the largely sympathetic state militia was called out, was mostly confined to one community, Pawtucket.¹³ The violence that gripped Providence in the late summer of 1914, however, had a different genesis and intensity. Here the focus of discontent was not on low wages but on the high cost of living.

The curious nationwide rise in food prices that had accompanied the 1913 depression was the subject of newspaper stories and investigations. As early as April 1913 the city of Providence launched an investigation into the sudden rise in the price of ice, but the reason behind that increase eluded city officials. At the same time, because of the high cost of ice, milk dealers in Connecticut and Rhode Island announced a 10 percent price increase. A year later, in New York City, an exhaustive study of food prices was ordered by Mayor John Mitchel. Mitchel's commission concluded that there were two reasons for the increases: the foreign demand engendered by World War I, which was then just two weeks old, and hoarding by both retail storekeepers and housewives. It does not seem to have occurred to the commission that housewives with hoards of food would most likely eat what they had rather than complain and starve, as many were in fact doing. The commission did concede, however, that "there has doubtless been collusion" among dealers "in some articles, but the present laws" made it difficult to do anything about these conspiracies—a situation that the Socialists had been campaigning to change for years.¹⁴

In late July 1914 both Providence mayor Joseph Gainer and Governor Aram Pothier commissioned studies to look into the cost of living. The Socialists thought little of these efforts, preferring to focus on the need for a changed economic system rather than on "making a show" of concern.¹⁵ In Providence much of the furor over high prices centered on the wholesale cost of macaroni and other pasta products. The Italian community on Federal Hill had accused wholesalers of disguising domestic pasta with foreign labels and boosting the price. On 22 August 1914 a noisy Federal Hill rally, hosted by the Socialist party and attended by a squadron of mounted police, denounced the 66 percent increase in the price of foodstuffs. The sight of two thousand constituents cheering the Socialists sufficiently unnerved the district's two Democratic state representatives that they urged Governor Pothier to do something about the profiteering.¹⁶

A week later Mayor Gainer's study group exonerated Providence merchants from price fixing. There was no conspiracy, said His Honor; the price of food was determined by forces beyond anyone's control. But the Providence Socialist weekly *Labor Advocate* disagreed, contending that food prices should have been as cheap as the mayor's "whitewash." After exposing the foreign label fraud, the *Advocate* ominously predicted that the career of one particularly offending merchant, identified as Frank P. Ventrone, was about to "come to an abrupt end so far as Federal Hill is concerned."¹⁷

In the early evening of Saturday, 29 August, another open-air meeting was held at the corner of Atwells Avenue and Dean Street, the very heart of Federal Hill, just a stone's throw from the Circolo Socialisti Hall at 140 Dean Street.¹⁸

"Agitators" from Boston and New York were rumored to be present at what was identified as a "labor meeting" by the nonsocialist press. As the gathering progressed, speakers urged the crowd not to remain docile in the face of brazen profiteering by wholesale grocers. Macaroni and other pasta products were the mainstay of the Italian diet; an increase from eight to nine cents a pound for domestic pasta was enough to spell ruination for an already impecunious immigrant's budget.

Unfortunately for civic order, the business establishment of Rhode Island's wholesale "Macaroni King," Frank P. Ventrone, was but a couple of blocks away. By now thoroughly aroused, the crowd headed down Atwells Avenue, collecting stones, clubs, and other missiles along the way. Reaching Ventrone's store, the mob smashed the windows and pillaged the interior. Boxes of spaghetti were broken open and the contents scattered over the street. Bystanders, young and old, helped themselves to generous amounts of pasta. Pearlman's Dry Goods, People's Pharmacy, and Cardegna's barber shop, on the same block as Ventrone's, also suffered shattered windows and looted stock. Rioters who entered Ventrone's store risked being pelted by missiles still being thrown by comrades at the rear of the mob; in this way twenty-year-old Domenic Delmonte sustained a serious head wound that made his arrest easier for the police. As usually happens in riots, the most audacious participants rose to prominence. One of these was twenty-five-year-old Emmanuel Parotti; brandishing an umbrella as a truncheon of revolt, Parotti led the mob in breaking windows in the pharmacy, hurling bottles at police, and attacking a streetcar.

The Macaroni Riots began with the looting and vandalizing of Frank Ventrone's wholesale pasta store on Atwells Avenue. Photo from the Providence Evening Bulletin, 31 August 1914. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8491)



With the arrival of police reserves, the disturbance entered a new phase. Long scorned and harassed by a police force made up of Irish and Yankees, the Italian members of the mob saw the riot as an opportunity for retribution. Brickbats and catcalls greeted the police as their patrol wagons arrived on Federal Hill. Patrolmen Leonard and McGlynn were felled by rocks and bottles. Sergeant Bennett was knocked unconscious by a missile. From an alley a rioter fired shots at Lieutenant Willis Doe, who returned fire and wounded his assailant. From the streets, from rooftops and windows, Federal Hill residents battled the police with flower pots, firewood, and bullets. Patrolman George Plunkett received a sniper's bullet in the foot. Several residents were shot by police. A false alarm brought fire apparatus from the nearby Hook and Ladder Company No. 6, adding to the din of breaking glass, gunshots, and imprecations. Streetcar service to the area was suspended, and street vendors fled as their pushcarts were commandeered by the mob.

Police reinforcements eventually managed to clear Atwells Avenue by driving the rioters into side streets. On Federal Street and Arthur Avenue,¹⁹ agitators attempted to conduct impromptu public meetings to exhort the crowd to rally and resist. Police repeatedly charged these gatherings, clubbing and firing their pistols into the air. By 6:00 P.M. Federal Hill was being patrolled by a hundred Providence policemen, commanded by Captain Silas Merrill, a veteran of the Red Flag Riot. Officers on horseback urged the curious to move on. Aside from an unsuccessful attempt to set fire to Ventrone's, the area became quiet, and regular patrol strength was resumed. In an hour of rioting, several policemen had been injured by missiles and one policeman and at least three rioters had been shot. Some wounded rioters were likely carried away by compatriots to avoid arrest.

With the rioting apparently quelled, Police Chief John A. Murray assured the public that the disturbances had not escalated to a point where the militia would need to be called in. When Frank Ventrone (then a Republican candidate for the Providence School Committee) arrived from his summer home in Warwick to survey the two thousand dollars' worth of damage that had been done to his property, he expressed amazement and explained what most of the rioters failed to understand: that it was unscrupulous retailers who were responsible for the current high price of pasta. The turmoil, in his opinion, was clearly the work of anarchists.

On Sunday the atmosphere in Federal Hill remained sullen but quiet into the afternoon hours. Here and there crowds collected, including one group that gathered near a Verdi Theatre billboard advertising a film with the provocative title *A Stone in the Street*. As the uneasy peace continued, it may have seemed that the disturbances were over. But they were not.

At three o'clock a process server named Samuel Brown arrived on Atwells Avenue with a writ of *habeas corpus* to be served on one Al Carroll, a local resident, for nonsupport. Carroll, a popular figure known as "The Chicken," was apprehended in full view of a gathering crowd. Apparently thinking that the arrest was related to the looting of Ventrone's, a gang of toughs overpowered Constable Brown on Federal Street and The Chicken was liberated.

A short while later a parade of boys formed on Acorn Street. Carrying a red flag fashioned from a flannel shirt, the diminutive revolutionaries found their procession interdicted by a squad of police. Shouting "*Viva la rivolta!*" a larger

group of men joined the boys' march and began hurling rocks at the police. Officers William Hall, Malcolm Berry, Frank Walters, and Sergeant William Brown found themselves facing the enlarged gang of men and boys. Twenty-four-year-old John Barto, alias Peter Bartolla, an alleged IWW member, threw a huge rock that struck Officer Berry on the left side of the face and knocked him unconscious. A shot from the police struck fifteen-year-old Quinnio Oddi in the chest, inflicting an apparently fatal wound. Brown and Hall then seized Barto and dragged him to the patrol wagon.

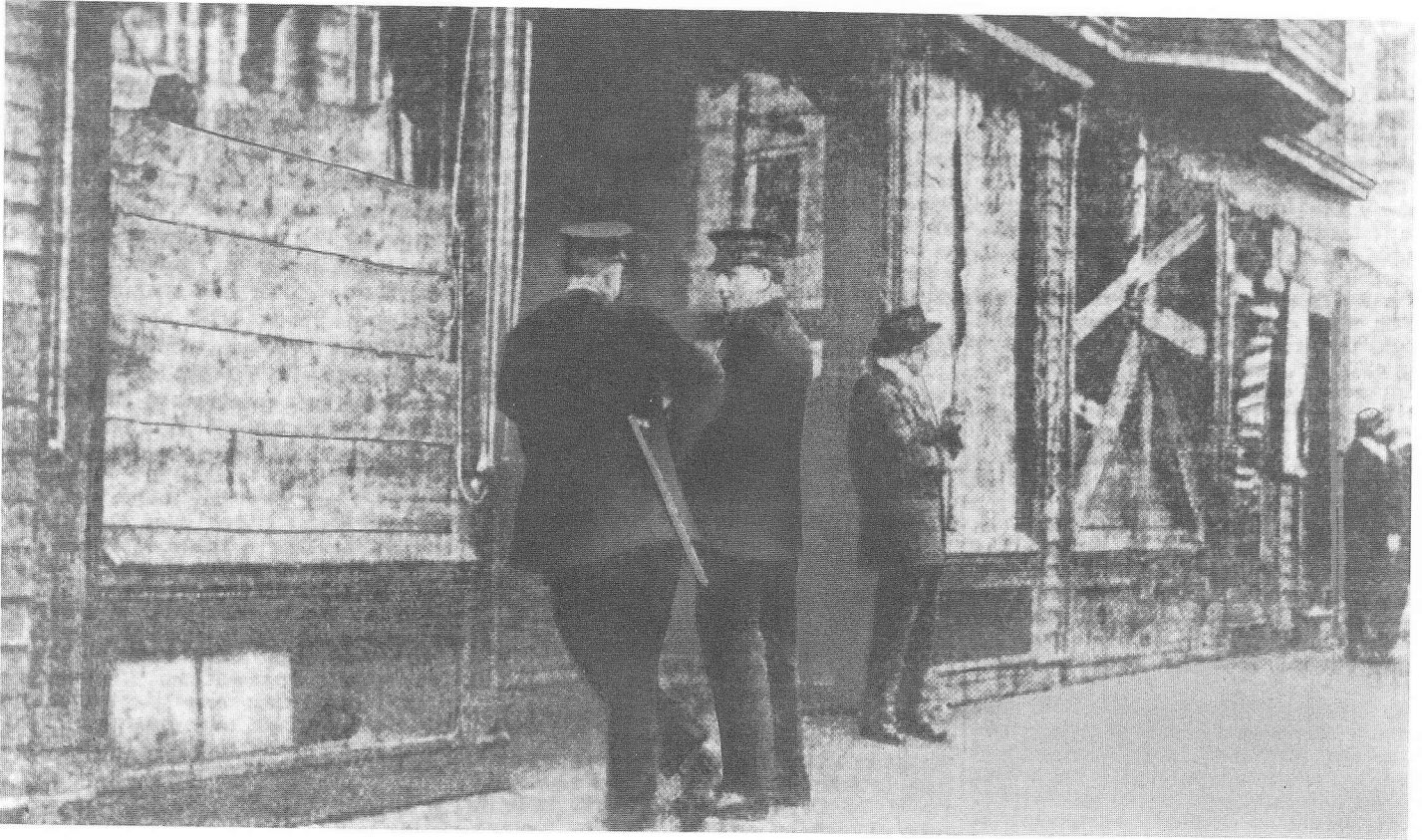
Though charged by the crowd, the two officers managed to get away with their prisoner. Patrolman Walters, however, found himself cornered, facing a mob infuriated by the sight of the gravely wounded Oddi. After emptying his revolver at the rioters, Walters was chased into an alley, where he was kicked, beaten, and stabbed in the left ear. Bleeding freely, the harassed patrolman ran for his life to the fire station at Atwells and America Street. While he reloaded his pistol inside, firemen remonstrated with the rioters, many of whom they knew. But the mob, frustrated at having lost its quarry, began abusing the firemen, and soon the station was under siege. Rocks and other missiles were flung against the station doors, and gunshots from the crowd shattered the windows. Fire lieutenant Robert McDonald, in the act of closing the horse stalls, collapsed with a bullet in his face.

Apprised of the new outbreak, Chief Murray immediately dispatched every available police officer to Federal Hill, with special detachments directed to the Circolo Socialisti meeting hall on Dean Street and the Karl Marx Club at 206 Atwells Avenue (just a few doors from Ventrone's).²⁰ While the riot was still going on, Bernardo Quartaroli, the Wobbly tailor, was informed that no meetings of any radical group would be allowed until further notice. Noting how the Providence police used their nightsticks in seeking out radicals in the crowd, the *Providence Evening News* later reported that "every effort was made to find a Socialist or an Anarchist, but the most they got was a fine collection of straw and soft hats."

Meanwhile, resupplied with fresh missiles from a nearby construction site, the mob—about twenty-five hundred strong, including women and children—swirled into Atwells Avenue. Facing this angry tide were three hundred policemen, many of them mounted, who charged the rioters repeatedly. For twenty minutes the battle raged without letup, with rocks, barrel staves, and sash weights hurled at the police and hundreds of shots fired from both sides. Patrolmen Johnson, Holland, Sheehan, and Sullivan were injured by rocks. About a dozen rioters were gunned down by a police fusillade; those not carried away by comrades lay in the street until ambulances from Rhode Island Hospital arrived. So much ammunition was expended by police that an additional supply of twelve hundred rounds had to be rushed from the Central Police Station.

As the police dispersed one crowd, another would form. Rioter James Sanantonio, alleged to have led a gang rampaging on Atwells Avenue, was carried to Rhode Island Hospital after police clubbed him insensible. Shop windows that had survived Saturday night's damage fell to the rioters. The Federal Hill Department Store, Parisi's Bakery, a pool hall, and a Chinese laundry were among the many commercial victims, while rocks and stray bullets broke windows in tenements and in the Atwells Avenue Primary School.

By 7:00 P.M. the police had succeeded in clearing the streets of rioters for the second time in twenty-four hours. The tally of casualties included a policeman



Police patrolled Federal Hill in the wake of the rioting. Photo from the *Providence Evening Bulletin*, 31 August 1914. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8492).

and a fireman shot and eight other policemen hospitalized with injuries. Eleven civilians were known to have been shot, none fatally, and dozens of others had suffered beating injuries. An unknown number of wounded had been carried off by compatriots for private treatment in order to save them from arrest. Quinnio Oddi, it was reported, was dying in Rhode Island Hospital.²¹



The anger and desperation that drove workers to engage in a protracted gun battle with police clearly went beyond the high price of macaroni. Although the *Providence Evening News* related the spirited harangue of a housewife who exhorted the crowd to remember that they were Italians, and that "Italians never give up," the names and addresses of the wounded and arrested indicate that non-Italians from other parts of the city were also involved in the Federal Hill rioting. As the *Labor Advocate* pointed out, vexation over a persistent economic downturn, profiteering merchants, and abrasive policemen was widespread. The *Advocate* explained the riots as an expression of frustration over the "inability of authorities to fix blame for high prices." Working-class families were victimized by the "inordinate greed" of wholesalers, said the paper. But the *Advocate* believed that it was Constable Brown's lack of finesse in arresting The Chicken that was the principal cause of Sunday's disturbances.²²

The capitalist press also had little difficulty in fixing the blame. According to rumors, Arturo Giovannitti had addressed the Saturday night meeting; a combination of excitable and temperamental Italians and the revolutionary spell cast by IWW wizards like Giovannitti was a recipe for civil disorder. Late on Sunday evening, after the rioting had subsided, an Italian man with a child in

MANY WOUNDED BY POLICE BULLETS ON FEDERAL HILL

Inability of Authorities to Fix Blame for High Prices Causes
Resentment Among Italian Workers.—Wholesale Stores
Wrecked and Contents Thrown Into Street.

CONSTABLE'S BAD BLUNDER CAUSES RIOT

Foolhardy Attempt to Arrest Youth on Trivial Charge Arouses
Crowd to Frenzy of Excitement.—Young Italian Boy
Dangerously Wounded by Policeman's Bullet and Scores
of Others Injured.

*The Labor Advocate of 5 September 1914
reported the riots from a Socialist perspective.
RIHS Collection (RHi X3 8493, RHi X3 8494).*

tow began serenading Atwells Avenue with a song that the *Evening Tribune* believed was "revolutionary" in character because "of the spirit he put into it." The concert came to an abrupt halt when a policeman told him to "shut up."²³

In the press, the "Macaroni Riots" were obliged to share front-page space with the First World War, now barely four weeks old. On Monday, 31 August, as Belgium reeled in the wake of the kaiser's army, Providence braced for a third convulsion while merchants nervously boarded up their shattered stores and took account of their losses. While French roads filled with thousands of refugees, an estimated three thousand persons congested the streets of Federal Hill in anticipation of another explosion. Over their morning newspapers Rhode Islanders could ponder the parallels of economics and ethnic rivalries behind

<small>PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKERS</small>	<h1>The Labor Advocate</h1>	<small>Printed and Published By THE LABOR ADVOCATE By THE LABOR ADVOCATE</small>
<small>VOL. 3, No. 2 PROVIDENCE, R. I. SEPTEMBER 5, 1914</small>	<h2>MEN AND BOYS SHOT DOWN IN FOOD PRICE WAR</h2>	<small>PROVIDENCE, R. I., SEPTEMBER 5, 1914 TWO CENTS—50 CENTS PER YEAR</small>

the Austrian siege of the czar's army in Poland and the workers' siege of Hook and Ladder Company No. 6. A minor automobile accident on Atwells Avenue was an occasion for heightened tension, and it appeared that rioting would break out anew. But that evening it was announced that in a unpublicized meeting with the members of the Circolo Socialisti, Frank Ventrone had agreed to price reductions. Native macaroni that had been selling at \$1.60 per box would now be sold at \$1.40, with similar reductions for imported products. In addition, Ventrone agreed to open his business to retail customers at the new wholesale prices. As word of the reduction agreement spread, the tension seemed to dissipate.²⁴

The *Journal* regarded Frank Ventrone's agreement as a generous gesture by a blameless merchant who was caught up in the vortex of a world war, uncontrollable market forces, and wrongful accusations of price manipulation. On the other hand, the Socialist press, though deploring violence, rightly credited the rioting with (in the words of the *Providence Evening News*) "bringing the merchants to their senses" and causing them to "plead for mercy." "The events of the past few days on the Hill have been a severe lesson to those who were not satisfied with ordinary profits," said the *Labor Advocate*. Providence's Roman Catholic diocesan newspaper, the *Providence Visitor*, attacked the IWW as "The Religion of Dynamite." Joseph Ettor was particularly singled out as a proponent of that creed, but the *Visitor* could offer no solution to what it acknowledged was a very real problem among working-class families, the high price of food.²⁵

The *Providence Evening News* offered the most in-depth coverage of the riots, which it refused to dismiss as so much Italian angst manipulated by radicals. The rioting was caused by high prices generally, not Socialist agitation, said the *News*, and it claimed that Federal Hill residents were not necessarily mollified by Circolo Socialisti's agreement with Ventrone. And price reductions or no, the shooting of Quinno Oddi had added another issue to the situation; many residents believed that young Oddi had actually died and that his slayer should be brought to justice. Finally, noting that the Providence police remained on

Federal Hill in some numbers, the News cited incidents of friction between citizens and patrolmen that betrayed the residents' lingering resentments.²⁶



While the local American Federation of Labor, with its well-paid skilled tradesmen and its Democratic party allies, planned the usual downtown marches and festivities for the upcoming Labor Day, *L'Eco*, Providence's Italian-language newspaper, advised all citizens concerned about the recent rioting to attend a poor man's Labor Day rally to be sponsored by the Socialists and the IWW at Olneyville Square.²⁷ Fliers advertising that gathering were scattered throughout the city, and especially on Federal Hill. The degree of alienation between foreign workers and the AF of L was evident in the federation's failure to respond to the concerns of low-paid Italian and other foreign-born workers other than to condemn the riots. In such indifference lay the secret of the IWW's appeal.

On Monday, 7 September, at 2:30 P.M., a thousand people assembled at Olneyville Square to hear the significance of the food-price agitation discussed by James Reid; Robert Hunt, editor of the *Labor Advocate* and Socialist gubernatorial candidate; John H. Cook, a peripheral participant in the violent 1902 streetcar strike; and Thomas Powers, president of the IWW textile union. As they and others spoke, mounted policemen stood guard near the speakers' platform and plainclothesmen circulated through the crowd. The speeches that day made it clear that while Providence's radical community did not advocate violence per se, it nonetheless looked on the outcome of the riots "as a point in the favor of the working classes." The problem went beyond the price of pasta; the cost of everything was too high, especially since workers' wages were so low. Conditions would have to change. "The uprising of our Italian brothers," said Robert Hunt, had taught Rhode Island workers two lessons: first, it was necessary to stand "shoulder to shoulder in opposition to those who would rob, cheat and defraud us"; second, instead of rioting, workers should "right their wrongs at the voting booth" by electing Socialist candidates (something that disenfranchised immigrants could not, in fact, do). Frank Morris, a Boston IWW organizer who had participated in the Providence tailors' strike the previous year, urged all in attendance to meet at Sixth District Court in three days, when the trial of Emmanuel Parotti, the umbrella-wielding rioter charged with leading the attack on Ventrone's, was scheduled. Italian and Franco-Belgian speakers followed Morris, and by four o'clock the rally broke up.²⁸

Returning via Broadway to Federal Hill, a group of about a hundred workers was shadowed by undercover policemen. The workers had advanced as far as Holy Ghost Church on Atwells Avenue when they encountered an elderly man, who proceeded to arouse their interest with an extemporaneous address and a brick pitched through a window. Immediately the crowd began hurling missiles of every description through the windows of establishments on both sides of the avenue. Several variety stores, a millinery parlor, two furniture stores, a clothing store, a liquor store, a bakery, and numerous tenements had their windows shattered. The carnival of stone throwing, glass breaking, and looting had begun again for the third time in little more than a week.²⁹

The police quickly arrived in force. As two hundred patrolmen attacked the crowd with riot batons, several officers were felled by stones. A squadron of mounted police appeared and began driving the crowd into side streets. To pre-

23 ARRESTS MARK FEDERAL HILL RIOT, THIRD IN 9 DAYS

Hoodlums Start Trouble.—Demonstration in Which Store Windows Are Shattered Believed Not Instigated by Authors of Previous Disorders.

Rioting broke out on Federal Hill again on 7 September after a week of uneasy peace. Headline in the Providence Evening Bulletin, 8 September 1914. RIHS Collection (RH1 X3 8495).

vent the sniping that had occurred on the last two occasions, officers preemptively brandished their revolvers, deliberately aiming them at every face that appeared in a window. Miraculously, no shots were fired by either side. Twenty-three men were arrested and charged with reveling. Though injuries were fewer, there was more physical damage done in the Labor Day riot than in the previous two episodes combined. For a half mile the doors and windows of restaurants, cafes, dry-goods stores, and private homes were indiscriminately shattered. According to the *Evening Tribune*, Federal Hill resembled a "war zone."³⁰

Some observers drew broad distinctions between the rioting of 7 September and that of 29 and 30 August. Because of the supposed youthfulness of the rioters and the fact that destruction was not limited to wholesale markets, the Labor Day disturbance was alleged to have been merely capricious. The deliberate smashing of tenement windows suggested aimless hooliganism. Yet of the twenty-three men arrested on Labor Day, six were over thirty years of age, three were older than fifty, and only three were minors. Vito Zablo, who may have been the mob's leader, was sixty-one. Most had jobs and families. Moreover, the rioters of August had also shown little discrimination in their vandalism and destruction, attacking barber shops, drug stores, saloons, a streetcar, and other nonwholesale targets.³¹

On the morning of 10 September, as Providence braced for a fourth riot, thousands of supporters from Federal Hill followed the radicals' Labor Day advice and expressed their solidarity with Emmanuel Parotti by converging on North Main Street near the courthouse. Three hundred patrolmen and deputy sheriffs lined the streets to keep crowds from collecting. Since the Riot Act had not been proclaimed at any of the three disturbances, no one had technically committed the offense of riotous assembly, and most of the fifty people arrested were charged with simple reveling and fined twenty dollars. But Parotti, identified as the leader of the initial attack on Ventrone's store, was charged with two counts of malicious damage in breaking windows at that establishment and smashing a window in a streetcar. "With tears streaming down his face," according to the *Journal*, he denied any involvement in the riot. After a three-and-a-half-hour trial, Judge Howard Gorham found Parotti guilty and sentenced him to six months in the Providence County Jail and a fifty-dollar fine. His attorney assured the press he would appeal. Surprisingly, the crowd dispersed without incident despite the unfavorable verdict.³²



The total cost of the Macaroni Riots was high: at least fourteen civilians sustained gunshot wounds, and dozens were injured; ten policemen and a fireman were wounded by rocks, bottles, knives, and bullets; approximately twenty thousand dollars in glass and inventory was lost by Federal Hill merchants. Given that no one was killed, however, the Macaroni Riots must be ranked behind the Olney's Lane Riots of 1831—which produced several fatalities—among Providence's worst civil disturbances. Eventually the prosperity that the United States enjoyed by supplying virtually everything to the warring powers of Europe had its effects at the hiring halls and in the paychecks of factory and shipyard workers, and there were no further riots on Federal Hill. Though food prices rose again during the war, workers' wages were also relatively higher.

The Industrial Workers of the World declined in importance in New England as the country became more emotionally involved in the First World War. Having lost its foothold in textile centers in the wake of its 1912 success in Lawrence, the IWW found itself the victim of violence and repression throughout the country as the United States moved closer toward intervention in Europe. For the immigrants of Providence and other New England cities, war-bond purchases, enlistments in the armed services, and similar demonstrations of patriotism helped pry open the door to participation in mainstream politics and AF of L unionism. One effect of that assimilation was that the region's Italian, Polish, Belgian, and other new immigrant workers were no longer completely voiceless; or, at least, they no longer needed to shout.

The Labor A

PROVIDENCE, R. I. SEPTEMBER

BOYS SHOT DOWN

Notes

1. Melvin Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the I. W. W.* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 227-62; Ardis Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1860-1912* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 117.
2. *Labor Advocate*, 12 Jan. 1912.
3. The following account of the Red Flag Riot is drawn from reports in the *Providence Daily Journal* and the *Providence Evening Bulletin*, 16 Sept. 1912. See also Paul Buhle, "Italian-American Radicals and the Labor Movement, 1905-1930," *Radical History Review* 17 (Spring 1978): 129. Buhle's study is invaluable for a broader view of the Italian-radical nexus in Rhode Island.
4. Caruso, Giovannitti, and Ettore were eventually freed by a Lawrence jury.
5. *Providence Daily Journal*, 17 Sept. 1912. For more on Coldwell, see Joseph Sullivan, "A Giant of Embodied Conscience": Joseph M. Coldwell and the Socialist Party in Rhode Island," *Rhode Island History* 50 (November 1992): 117-28.
6. *Providence Daily Journal*, 17 Sept. 1912; *Providence Evening Tribune*, 16 Sept. 1912.
7. *Providence Daily Journal*, 1, 5 Apr. 1913.
8. *Ibid.*, 3 Apr. 1913.
9. *Ibid.*, 5 Apr. 1913.
10. *Providence Sunday Journal*, 6 Apr. 1913.
11. *Labor Advocate*, 30 Mar., 27 July 1913; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 260.
12. See Jerry W. Calvert, *The Gibraltar: Labor and Socialism in Butte, Montana* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1988).
13. Scott Molloy's *Trolley Wars: Streetcar Workers on the Line* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996) is the most current and only complete account of the 1902 strike.
14. *Providence Daily Journal*, 20 Aug. 1914.
15. *Labor Advocate*, 22 Aug. 1914.
16. *Providence Sunday Journal*, 23 Aug. 1914.
17. *Labor Advocate*, 29 Aug. 1914. Details in the following account of the events of Saturday, 29 August, and Sunday, 30 August, are taken from the *Providence Sunday Journal* and the *Providence Sunday Tribune*, 30 Aug. 1914, and the *Providence Evening Tribune* and the *Providence Evening News*, 31 Aug. 1914.
18. The corner of Atwells and Dean had another significance of which Providence's recent immigrants were doubtless unaware. It was the very spot where Thomas Dorr's partisans, mostly disenfranchised workers, constructed an artillery battery to defend Federal Hill during the 1842 Dorr Rebellion.
19. Arthur Avenue was later renamed Balbo Avenue after Italian Fascist aeronaut Italo Balbo, chief of Mussolini's air force. After the Second World War, Balbo Avenue became DePasquale Avenue in honor of District Court judge Luigi DePasquale, who as a young factory operative participated in a 1913 textile strike with Nicola Sacco (of Sacco and Vanzetti) and local Socialist leader Joseph M. Coldwell, with whom he maintained a lifelong friendship. Sullivan, "Giant of Embodied Conscience," 119.
20. The founder of the Karl Marx Club, Louis Nimini, died in 1912, not long after the Red Flag Riot. Buhle, "Italian-American Radicals," 130.
21. *Providence Evening Tribune*, 1 Sept. 1914.
22. *Providence Evening News*, 5 Sept. 1914; *Labor Advocate*, 5 Sept. 1914.
23. *Providence Evening Tribune*, 1 Sept. 1914. There is no evidence that Giovannitti visited Rhode Island at this time.
24. *Providence Daily Journal*, 1 Sept. 1914.
25. *Providence Evening News*, 1 Sept. 1914; *Labor Advocate*, 5 Sept. 1914; *Providence Visitor*, 6 Sept. 1914.
26. *Providence Evening News*, 1 Sept. 1914. Oddi seems to have recovered. A survey of Rhode Island newspapers and records of the State Department of Health to 1920 discloses no notice of his death, which, given the circumstances, would have been well publicized.
27. *L'Eco del Rhode Island*, 4 Sept. 1914.
28. *Labor Advocate*, 5, 12 Sept. 1914; *Providence Evening News*, 8 Sept. 1914.
29. *Providence Evening News*, 8 Sept. 1914.
30. *Providence Daily Journal*, *New York Times*, *Providence Evening Tribune*, 8 Sept. 1914.
31. *Providence Daily Journal*, *New York Times*, *Providence Evening Tribune*, 8 Sept. 1914; *Providence City Directory*, 1914.
32. *Providence Evening News*, *Providence Daily Journal*, 11 Sept. 1914.



Rhode Island History
110 Benevolent Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02906-3152
ISSN 0035-4619

SECOND CLASS
POSTAGE PAID AT
PROVIDENCE, RI

Cover
Detail from "Truth Shall Make You Free," an engraving in The Envoy from Free Hearts to the Free (Pawtucket: Juvenile Emancipation Society, 1840). RIHS Collection (RH: X3 6716).