



MAKERS UNKNOWN?

Material Objects & the Enslaved

CURATORIAL NOTE

Where is the proof? This question was raised to us many times as we put together this exhibition. The conventional archive provides material evidence of the past; but how do you represent and validate the experiences of communities whose lives were recorded in different ways than what we are all trained to see? Oral history is not always legitimized or valued in the same way as other forms of documentation found in the traditional archive. Due to colonization and politics of wealth and power, objects of material culture have historically been removed from the dominated communities who made them.

Inspired in part by Ana Flores' work we attempted to find the tangible remains of slavery in Rhode Island and the stories behind the objects. Many goods, including Colonial furniture, candles, barrels, and cheese, are documented in the archive, the one created by the master. The individual whose skilled labor produced the particular object is never mentioned. We found the stories of these "unknown makers" by rereading the archives of prominent families to understand the unfree labor and materials produced by enslaved people. Although we cannot easily say who built exact pieces of furniture, we can surmise that enslaved labor was used to produce particular goods in the state of Rhode Island. A combination of local historical accounts, journals, and oral histories gave us a window into colonial Rhode Island society, as experienced by free and unfree communities of color. Using the archive

creatively we address the silences that have been created as a result of a global archival process which privileges the histories of those in power.

We have attempted in this exhibition to put the story of free and enslaved people of color at the forefront of colonial Rhode Island history, while encouraging visitors to examine the archive with a different lens. Glancing at Ana Flores' *The History of the Coffee Table* one can easily miss the hidden laborer holding up the table and providing a surface for the tea set, which the enslaved would have used to serve its wealthy owners. In this exhibition we challenge our viewers to re-examine the world around them to see whose labor has been rendered invisible by the archive. We ask the question: Who built and maintained the grand homes of Rhode Island? We ask you to look beyond the aesthetics of the teapot and think of the individual who served the tea. By rethinking the archive, we create new narratives that include the erased stories of communities of color. We do so in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the past, and better grasp our present.

Maiyah Gamble-Rivers

MANAGER OF PROGRAMS & OUTREACH, CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SLAVERY AND JUSTICE

Shana Weinberg

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SLAVERY AND JUSTICE

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Objects tell stories. They have a social life since they were made and then used in some fashion. The story of their making and use is part of our past. Objects and their material culture open to us new archives, ones that sometimes are elided because of our preoccupations with the word and the various ways in which the word is presented: books, diaries, letters, newspapers, proclamations and other forms of scribal inscriptions. But what happens when we want to tell an alternative story, one that foregrounds the experiences of the enslaved? Those who were supposed to have no voice; those considered less than. What are the sources that we need to look at and examine to find the voices of the unnamed to bring forth the human experiences of being enslaved?

At the CSSJ we wrestle with this issue. Central to our public history programming and exhibitions is our attempt to find ways to excavate the voice of the enslaved and to do so in order to narrate a more complete history of racial slavery in America.

In this exhibition our focus on material culture was to find ways in which pipes, cups and saucers, paintings, chairs, and tables have histories and how these histories both in their making and narration reveal hidden things about the system of racial slavery. In many parts of America during the period of slavery, the hammer used to build a house was itself made by an enslaved person who was a craftsman. Yet the maker of the hammer and builder of the house remain unknown. As “makers unknown” their

skills were crucial not only for plantation life and system of coerced labor in general but for the creation of luxury goods for the elite. The story of how goods were made by the enslaved is one yet to be fully told. It is one segment of the hidden story about slavery that needs revision and opening. And, there is another hidden segment. It is this: the enslaved created a material culture that was integral to the resistance against slavery. In creating this they made themselves into human beings against all odds. They created forms of culture in a society that considered them things and “property in the person.” In creating a material culture of gardens, songs, language, dance, and new religions, the enslaved asserted his/her humanity. In this exhibition we have paid attention to some elements of this material culture of resistance. We do so to make a claim about the enslaved – that the objects they made speak to us today.

To make this exhibition possible many individuals and collections were involved. I would like to thank all of the researchers and institutions who provided support and guidance for this exhibition, however, we need to thank the co-curators of this exhibition: Maiyah Gamble-Rivers and Shana Weinberg. This has been their work.

Anthony Bogues

DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SLAVERY AND JUSTICE

The History of the Coffee Table

Ana Flores, 2011–2017, wood, glass, silver.
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.



ARTIST NOTE

The erased history of slavery in Rhode Island converged with my own Cuban history in an unlikely setting, the woodlands of Southern Rhode Island. It was 2006 and I was Artist in Residence for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency working at their newly built headquarters in Charlestown, Rhode Island, at the Kettle Pond Visitor Center. The center is located just off of Route 1 South, not far from my studio. As an ecological artist with experience doing community collaborations, I was helping expand the programming at the center. The first public art project planned was a sculptural installation along their trails entitled *Punctuating Place*. It would portray three eras of human habitation on that land at three different sites.

One of the eras would be the Indigenous/Woodland period celebrating the Narragansett people who had maintained a strong presence on their tribal lands in this area since ancient times. Primary documents and diaries I was researching soon revealed the other stories I needed to tell. The archaeological record stated that the headquarters occupied a portion of what had been a 2,000-acre plantation owned by the Champlin family in the 17th to 18th centuries. The plantation's main production had been

sheep destined for plantations in the South and in the West Indies. The record also mentioned there was a stone building that served as the slave quarters.

This discovery was particularly significant because paralleling my work at the headquarters I was creating sculptural work in my studio inspired by Cuban history, also addressing slavery. My work on Cuba began in earnest in 2002 as a response to my first trip back to Cuba after a 40-year absence. I had come as a child with my family to the United States as political refugees after the Cuban revolution. The trip back inspired a profound artistic exploration of the island's complicated story and my own Cuban-American identity. The first project that resulted was a multi-media installation entitled *Cuba Journal*. As that project began to travel nationally to museums and galleries, I continued to make new work related to Cuba. The new works dug deeper into the island's colonial past and its economy based on sugar and slavery.

In the spring of 2007 I installed *Punctuating Place* and with it a sculptural piece about slavery in Charlestown, a historic fact that was a surprise to many visitors. A few years later I began the sculptural piece, *The History*

of the Coffee Table, first exhibited at the Newport Art Museum in 2011-12. For this installation at the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice at Brown University new elements have been added. The Windsor chairs were made at the end of the 18th century by Obediah Browning of Charlestown (generously loaned by John Scully of Woodbridge, Connecticut). The map/tile piece under the sculpture is inspired by a sea-atlas published by Pierre Mortier in 1693 in the archives of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University. The molasses prints on wood developed as a way of portraying the larger shipping story behind the triangle trade. Many Caribbean plantations were dependent on market goods grown or bred in South County. I've used molasses and milk paints to make the imprints. The wood for these pieces is locally grown as would have been the wood used for crating and making barrels used in the triangle trade.

Ana Flores

1

The History of the Coffee Table

Ana Flores, 2011-2017, wood, glass, silver.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.





INTRODUCTION

A tobacco pipe, a ledger, a portrait. What do art, objects, and the records left behind tell us about how enslaved and free communities of color in Rhode Island lived and interacted with each other? How do the materials preserved today and absences in the archives shape how we remember or forget communities of color? In the 18th century, Rhode Island was the epicenter of the slave trade in the Americas: boats were built and fitted; sail lofts and rope walks were made, while factories produced goods for exchange on the West African coast and farmers grew the supplies necessary for the voyages. This exhibition examines material culture to understand the ways in which the institution of **racial slavery shaped the daily lives of all Rhode Islanders**. Typically, historic archives preserve the objects and documents of prominent merchant families. When we **reread these objects** and archives to better understand the lives of the individuals whom they enslaved, we find **within the gaps of the formal archives, new narratives**. *Makers Unknown* represents the work of artisans of color whose contributions to their craft **remain unrecognized**. This is our starting point. The material culture produced by enslaved and free people of color for themselves or in their capacity as an unending source of coerced labor gives us a lens into their **agency, humanity**, and the many ways they **negotiated freedom**.



“One must never permit the Negroes the use of pipes for fear of fire; tobacco should be granted and given as a powder.”

—FRENCH SLAVE SHIP CAPTAIN, LATE 18TH CENTURY

2

Scene on the Coast of Africa

François-Auguste Biard, 1844.

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, GREENWICH, LONDON.

Archival documents reveal that tobacco was used as a form of currency in exchange for African slaves. Fearing a possible insurrection, European slavers also used tobacco as a tool to “control their cargo,” the enslaved, during the Middle Passage. European short pipes, also known as “slave pipes” and long pipes have been discovered at African sites tied to the slave trade as well as at slave quarters in the United States. Clay tobacco pipes excavated in North America gives us insight into Black craftsmanship in the New World. The African influence can be found in the design inscribed into the clay using similar techniques as African potters. Shortly after the introduction of slavery laws in the late 17th century, the practice of making tobacco pipes by enslaved people disappeared due to full-time field work on tobacco plantations. This led to an increased importation of European-made pipes.



3

Tobacco Pipes [REPLICAS]

20th century reproductions, Colonial North America, plaster, 4.5 x 2.1 x 12.5 cm

HAFFENREFFER SPECIAL FUND PURCHASE, LOAN FROM THE HAFFENREFFER MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY COLLECTION, TEMPI002.15-16.

Smoking was a ubiquitous activity throughout the Colonial period in the Americas. After learning how to cultivate tobacco from the indigenous populations, Europeans brought the commodity back to Europe where it was an instant success. Smoking pipes, like the replicas on display here, were

“The pipes ... [are] decorated in a West African art style ... the pipe makers ... used the same techniques as the African potters. [As enslaved people were forced into full-time work] African-style pipes disappeared soon afterward...”

—DR. MATTHEW EMERSON, ANTHROPOLOGIST

mass-produced by the 17th century. Pipes were typically molded from clay, some bearing insignia or symbols on their bowls. In European contexts, smoking was initially a leisurely activity; 17th-century pipes typically have longer stems and heels on the bottom of the bowl to allow the pipe to rest on a table surface. Smoking would eventually become a more commonplace activity in everyday life, including during work. Pipe stems accordingly became shorter to facilitate hands-free smoking.



PRESTIGE AND STATUS

The system of craft apprenticeship gave credit to the master of the shop, making it difficult to know who performed the actual labor behind an object. Instead of indicating a particular creator, in many instances archival records list the artisan as **attributed to** or **maker unknown**. An inability to find or cite specific names of enslaved, free African, and Native artisans in Rhode Island's 17th and 18th centuries in various decorative art industries does not prove the absence of their coerced labor. It proves the opposite. The anonymity inherent in the assumption that enslaved people provided a silent and unending coerced labor pool effectively erases their contributions.

When researching period newspaper advertisements for **runaways** we see that the **owner** loudly and clearly lauded the specific artisanship, intelligence, talents, and attractiveness of enslaved people who under their own agency **absented** themselves from slavery. Within masters' pleas and promises of reward for the return of these "human prizes" in advertisements we see precise characteristics of some of the enslaved and the skilled work they did.

Reading against the grain reveals these **historical silences**. So now as we examine account and daybooks, diaries, and letters of business transactions – places where the reduction of human beings into economic commodities is recorded and discussed, a picture emerges, one that tells us a fuller story about this time.



4
John Potter and Family

c. 1740, wood.
COURTESY OF THE NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY.
We do not know very much about the life of this particular boy depicted in the painting. For many in Rhode Island's enslaved community, life could be quite isolated. Many

of the enslaved lived in the same home as their white owners often in hallways or open spaces rather than in living quarters of their own. Depending on the location of their owner's property, they could be far removed from other people of color. The boy in the painting is serving tea to the Potters, a wealthy family in South Kingstown, Rhode Island. John

Potter and his second wife Elizabeth Hazard were part of an elite group referred to as the Narragansett Planters who operated large farms with enslaved labor to produce crops and livestock for export to Caribbean plantations.



5
A West India Sportsman
Make haste with the Sangaree, Quashaie, and tell Quaco to drive the Birds up to me – I'm ready.

J.S. [James Sayers], Published November 1, 1807, Hand-colored etching, 257x349mm.
COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, GREENWICH, LONDON.

Following the 1807 ban of the slave trade in British dominions, William Holland published a series of prints critiquing colonial exploitations. This particular illustration mocks the planter class, highlighting their idleness and pretentious lifestyle. James Sayers' illustration depicts two white male planters and the enslaved people who made this lifestyle possible. One enslaved person in the background is trying to lure birds closer to the planters for them to hunt, while two others are providing shade for the planters. Another person fans flies away from the pig roast, while a small figure that appears to be a child is holding a glass of sangaree larger than the size of his own head. The canteens of rum, brandy and sangaree enjoyed by the planter class would have required sugar cane, produced with enslaved labor.



6

Mug with slave auction scene

c. 1820-1860.

REEVES COLLECTION, WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY, LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA [2016.4.1].

The front of this mug illustrates a close-up view of the sale of an enslaved boy. It is likely that the young child on the barrel had been asked to dance to demonstrate his good health to buyers, a common practice



among slave auctions. The back side of the mug reads, "Like cattle to a fair/They sell us, young and old/From mother too they tear/ For love of filthy gold." The line comes from the *Sorrows of Yamba*, an anti-slavery poem published in 1797 by Hannah More. The full poem tells the story of Yamba's capture, enslavement, and suicidal despair.

The system of slavery created a segregated society in which white merchants rose to prominence and wealth, and enjoyed a more leisurely life made possible by the labor of the enslaved. The most prominent and successful Rhode Islanders modeled their lifestyles after their European counterparts, amassing family portraits and household goods that would speak to their importance and place in society. Depictions of the enslaved in paintings and objects served as status symbols, showing the prominence of their owners, and reinforcing ideas about society, race, and class. While many of these decorative arts have become part of the archive and created a historical memory of their owners, we should reexamine these objects to understand the lives of the enslaved people behind them and the everyday labor they performed.



7

Coffee cup with The Tea Drinkers

Coffee cup said to be made by Philip Christian; transfer-printed likely by the partnership of Sadler and Green, c. 1760-1770, porcelain, image transfer-printed in black.

COURTESY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SLAVERY MUSEUM, NATIONAL MUSEUMS LIVERPOOL.



8

Coffee pot with The Tea Drinkers

Coffee pot said to be made by Josiah Wedgwood and transfer-printed likely by the partnership of Sadler and Green, ca. 1761-1780, porcelain, image transfer-printed in black.

COURTESY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SLAVERY MUSEUM, NATIONAL MUSEUMS LIVERPOOL.



9

Shell-edged pearlware sherds

c. 1775-1810, earthenware ceramic.

COURTESY OF THE COCUMSCUSSOC ASSOCIATION.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THORALF ISLAND.

A popular Colonial-era ceramic, pearlware was created by English potter and entrepreneur Josiah Wedgwood. Mimicking Asian porcelain, Wedgwood was one of the first to industrialize the manufacturing of pottery, making it cheap and accessible. The popularity of his products allowed Wedgwood to work his way up to the middle class. The dining tables of Rhode Island's wealthy plant-

ers such as Lodowick Updike II (1725-1804) of Cocumscussoc would have been set with individual place-settings of these "shell-edged" wares for family meals and entertaining. Sherds of white-earthenware ceramics with blue paint from dishes, soup plates, and serving platters can be found in abundance at the Updike's plantation. These broken remains provide a glimpse into the unfree labor of enslaved people, who waited on the white planter family and their numerous guests.

"The slave-dealer, slave-holder, and the slave-driver are virtually the agents of the consumer, and may be considered as employed and hired by him to procure the commodity."

—WILLIAM FOX, BRITISH ABOLITIONIST, 1791



BUILDING RHODE ISLAND'S ECONOMY

Whatever initial moral objections that some white Rhode Islanders had to the transatlantic slave trade diminished during the 18th century as they increasingly reaped the **economic benefits**. The slave trade created a powerful economic and business network, establishing and sustaining **wealthy classes of merchants** in Europe and the New World. Records show that Rhode Islanders launched at least a **thousand slaving vessels** before the slave trade became illegal in 1807. In total, these voyages led to the enslavement of more than one-hundred thousand people of African descent who were sold to labor across the Americas. Because so many ships left from Rhode Island for Africa, local merchants developed global trading relationships and established a variety of businesses connected to the slave trade including **producing items** that would outfit a ship to embark on a slave voyage, as well as the production of household goods and foodstuffs that would be sold to plantations in the West

Indies. Caribbean plantation economies focused almost exclusively on sugar production, and as such, they relied on Rhode Island products such as furniture and home goods to outfit their plantations. Some Rhode Islanders who began in the provisioning business, such as Aaron Lopez, originally in the spermaceti candle business, found themselves **increasingly directly tied to the slave trade** as their wealth increased. As Rhode Islanders became more invested in the slave trade, the number of enslaved people within the state increased as their unfree labor was needed for farming and various businesses. While in 1680 the census records show 175 enslaved people living in Rhode Island, that number tripled 40 years later. By 1750 records show over 3,000 enslaved people in the Rhode Island colony. The rise of the number of enslaved people in the region laid the basis for the diversification of the economy, allowing for the **creation of a merchant and artisan class**.





10
Molasses Residue/Triangle Trade

Ana Flores, 2017, wood, molasses, milk paint,
24 x 42 in.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.



11
Bullion weight

c. 1680s-1878, metal.

COURTESY OF THE COCUMSCUSSOC ASSOCIATION.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THORALF ISLAND.

Because no concrete evidence of coin production at Cocumscussoc exists, this bullion weight, manufactured in London between 1680 and 1878, is something of an anomaly but points to the global network of trans-Atlantic trade that the Narragansett Planters were connected to. Weights measuring bullion – gold and silver “bits” used to mint currency – are small in size, comprised of a copper alloy exterior and an internal lead base. The embossed “D” symbol, as seen on the weight’s “9 o’clock” position, stands for “denarius,” a Latin term used to refer to ancient silver “pennies” or small change. The Roman numerals (“XV”), at top center, reveal that the artifact’s weight is equivalent to 15 pennyweights – a common Colonial coin value. Three identical images, depicting a British crown atop a man’s head, encompass the lower portion of the weight.



12
Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam

John Greenwood, c. 1752-58, oil on bed ticking,
37 3/4 x 75 in. (95.9 x 190.5 cm).

COURTESY OF THE SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM,
MUSEUM PURCHASE, 256:1948.

Enslaved people of African descent form the backdrop of this raucous scene depicting

Rhode Island’s elite merchants and captains. These individuals, unclothed and unfree are placed at the periphery of the painting, sleeping in the corner next to overturned chairs and serving drunken captains. This position allows the viewer’s gaze to focus on the prominent individuals who commissioned the satirical painting of themselves. The former Dutch

colony of Suriname, where the scene takes place, was an important site of trade during this time. It was linked to New England by the businesses of slavery. Many of the objects in the painting such as the candles, tables, and chairs would have likely come from Rhode Island.



13

The ship Castor and Other Vessels in a Choppy Sea

Thomas Luny, 1802, oil on canvas.

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, GREENWICH, LONDON.

This painting depicts a fleet of merchant ships off the coast of New England. Originating outside of Portland, Maine, the ship *Castor* shown here engaged in trans-Atlantic trade with Philadelphia, New York, and the West Indies. Captained by mariner and shipbuilder Daniel Brocklebank, the *Castor* was one of the first ships built in the Brocklebank shipbuilding enterprise. By 1795 he had 11 vessels. Following the death of Daniel Brocklebank, relatives Thomas and John took over the business and in 1815 they helped to end the British East India Company's trading monopoly, returning with a freight estimated to be worth over £10,000.



14

Sugar-cane cutters in Jamaica, Caribbean

c. 1880, albumen print, 175 x 227 mm.

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, GREENWICH, LONDON.

Almost 50 years after the emancipation of slavery in Jamaica, this late 19th century photograph depicts a group of cane cutters on a sugarcane plantation. Despite the presence of the white planter at the right of the photograph and the various workers laying on the ground eating sugar cane, labor on the sugar plantation was far from picturesque. Due to the global demand for sugar and 16 to 19 hours of daily labor, the life expectancy of an enslaved person sent to work on a Caribbean plantation was just seven years. The sugar industry did not end with the emancipation of slavery but shifted the enslaved person to the status of apprentice and later, wage laborer. This new status, however, did not change the rigorous work in the cane fields nor improve the day-to-day labor conditions.



HIDDEN LABOR, HIDDEN LIVES

The labor of the enslaved was used to grow and diversify Rhode Island's economy. The labor of people of color **contributed to many different industries** including barrel making, rum distilling, farming, as well as various maritime jobs. While the archival records that exist today highlight the activities of white merchants, we also find **traces of the lives of the enslaved**. In Providence and Newport enslaved people worked in various merchant businesses. In Narragansett County, enslaved people worked the fertile soil on farms that grew produce, dairy and livestock, much of it for trade in the West Indies. Many enslaved and free blacks **found themselves engaged in the maritime trade**, from working on the waterfront loading and unloading ships to serving on the crew. Arthur Flagg of Newport worked as a rope-maker both during enslavement and after his emancipation, Quam as a cooper, and John Bettis as a blacksmith. Edward Abbie served as the cabin boy on the slave ship *Sally* for Captain Esek Hopkins, his owner. Caesar Lyndon maintained the accounting books for the various businesses of his owner, Colonial governor, Josiah Lyndon. Free and enslaved individuals also engaged in work that did not directly tie to the trade but **contributed to Colonial Rhode Island life**; Pompe Stevens worked as gravestone polisher and carver, Prince Updike became known for his chocolate, and "Duchess" Quamino who did **domestic labor** during her enslavement, later becoming a pastry cook after gaining her freedom.



15

The Economic Activities of the Narragansett Planters

Ernest Hamlin Baker, 1939.

COURTESY OF THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE.

Enslaved Black labor is at the forefront of this painting which explores the world of the 18th century Narragansett Plantations. The use of the word plantations is not a coincidence – it reflects a farming system reliant on slave labor and where the majority of enslaved people in Rhode Island lived and worked. Unfree people of color worked with livestock

and produced agricultural items for export which brought the Narragansett Planters of southeastern Rhode Island incredible wealth and prestige. The Narragansett Pacers, horses with a steady gait, were indispensable for Caribbean sugar plantation owners. Cheese, another lucrative export, was often produced by enslaved women, although this painting depicts a man stacking the wheels. Beyond what can be seen in this painting, enslaved people performed a variety of tasks including domestic work, meal preparation, and the building of the stone walls for which the area

is known for, as well as engaging in artisanal work such as blacksmithing and rope making. The inclusion of a tall ship is telling – the most successful of the planters built docks of their own to ship and receive goods to and from the various Caribbean markets directly, and in some cases for illegal smuggling.

16

Manifest of the brig Sally

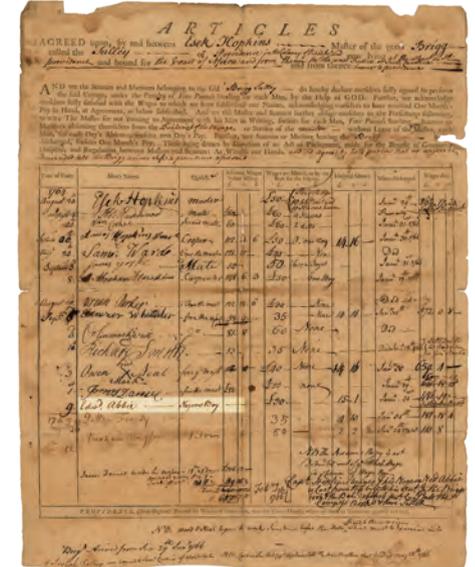
September 11, 1764. Brown family business records.

COURTESY OF THE JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY AT BROWN UNIVERSITY.

This cargo document lists all the goods on the slave ship Sally. Outfitting a ship was a huge undertaking in which many merchants, craftsmen, and farmers contributed.



Many of the goods listed here include sugar, onions, bread, flour, and candles that would have been produced with the help of enslaved people. The document is dated September 11, 1764, the day when the brig leaves Providence, Rhode Island, for the West Coast of Africa.



Articles for the brig Sally

September, 1764, Brown family business records.

COURTESY OF THE JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY AT BROWN UNIVERSITY.

“One Month’s Pay in Hand, at Agreement” might have enticed some members of the slave ship Sally’s crew to enlist, though Edward Abbie would not have had a choice. As Captain Esek Hopkins’ enslaved person, Edward is listed on this document as “a negro boy.” Many free and enslaved men performed labor in various maritime industries including slaving voyages.

Symbolic Slave Garden

Curated by Prof. Geri Augusto

IMAGES COURTESY OF RUTH CLARK.

The enslaved brought immense innovation to the new spaces they were forced into. The gardens of the enslaved served as markers of the botanical skills those in bondage possessed, as aesthetic spaces of the imagination, and as a reminder of the importance for the enslaved to cultivate and harvest crops for their own use. By disconnecting their labor from that which would benefit their master, the enslaved were able to carve out moments for themselves in the tiny plots outside of their cabins. In some instances, the enslaved used the profits from their private gardens to buy their own freedom. Please visit CSSJ's symbolic slave garden located outside behind the Center to see how the enslaved incorporated found objects and African knowledges into their own plots.



“Who is it that clears up the forest, cultivates the Land, manages the stock, husbands the grain, and prepares it for table? Who is it that digs from cotton, sugar, and rice fields the means which build southern Cities, Steam boats, School houses and churches? I answer that it is the slave. That perform this labor, and yet they or their children are not permitted to enjoy any of the benefits of the institutions: our former slaves who are now British subjects, are about trying the dangerous experiment of taking care of themselves – which has so far proved to be a very successful one.”

—HENRY BIBB, FORMER SLAVE AND ABOLITIONIST



19

Plants of Bondage/Liberation Flora

Geri Augusto, 2014.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

IMAGE COURTESY OF RUTH CLARK.

An assemblage of seeds/pods/grains/dried leaves/shells and *objets trouvés* on fiber and cloth, encapsulating the botanical

knowledge and agro-forestry skills of the captive Africans (overwhelmingly) and Native Americans enslaved on plantations in the New World. The assemblage encodes a material expression of the enslaved memory and histories. It is created on acrylic and a late 20th century wooden seed bin.

Key to the Assemblage

RICE & INDIGO

Slave-grown in: South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Carolina Sea Islands (Gullah territory).
Rice also in Mexico; indigo in Martinique.
[Indigo-dyed cotton cloth by Ann Chinn.]

In field rows, L-R: Sorghum, okra, congo/cow/black eyed peas (originally from Africa); maize/corn (Native American), pumpkin.

In shell dishes: Black and yellow benne/sesame seed (originally from Africa).

Callaloo/amaranth (indigenous to Americas), Guinea-hen/*galinha de angola* feather.

Cultivated and raised by self-liberated Africans and Afro-descendants in: maroon settlements and towns (Jamaica, Surinam), *quilombos* and *mocambos* (Brazil), *palenques* (throughout Latin America).

Black Nigerian cotton cloth and blue Yoruba *aso oke* cloth from the collection of the artist.

ZIMBO/BUZIO

(shell currency in the Kongo kingdom, and also symbol of 1798 Brazilian slave revolt) and Brazilian *capoeirista* figurine.

TOBACCO & COTTON

Slave-grown in: Virginia (tobacco) and throughout all the U.S. South, as well as Brazil and Colombia.
Malian *bôgòlanfini* (mudcloth) from collection of Karen Allen Baxter.

Cacao, coffee, sugar, & mandioca/cassava.
Pau brasilis (red dyewood tree).

Slave-grown or harvested in: Brazil.
Burlap coffee bag.

SUGAR & COFFEE

Slave-grown in: Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, Antigua, Martinique, and other Caribbean islands; Brazil, Mexico. Sugar also in Louisiana and Florida. Traditional Jamaican cotton cloth for clothing of enslaved women from collection of the artist.

CLOVES, VANILLA BEAN, COCONUT

Slave-grown in: Swahili Emirates of East Africa (Zanzibar, Lamu, Pemba), Mauritius, Madagascar, and other Indian Ocean islands.
Banana fiber paper.



20

Reworked Glass Disc (GAMING PIECE)

c. possibly 1700, glass.

COURTESY OF THE COCUMSCUSSOC ASSOCIATION.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THORALF ISLAND.

Used in the Narragansett gambling game of "Hubbub," this glass disc was reworked by Native hands after the initial glass vessel was discarded by Cocumscussoc's Smith or Updike families during the late 1600s or early 1700s. The disc's white enameled stripes and golden hue indicate that the original glass vessel, a fragile vase or decanter, was of German manufacture. Skillfully

knapped into a circular shape, scratch marks across the enameled surface suggest heavy use-wear from intense games in which flat discs were tossed onto a wooden tray and points earned based on which side of the disc landed "face-up." Although Hubbub was a social activity that redistributed material wealth within the community, it was criticized by Roger Williams, a part-time resident of Cocumscussoc by the late 1630s, as evidence of paganism and waywardness amongst local Native peoples.

21

Bottle neck scraper

c. late 1600s, glass.

COURTESY OF THE COCUMSCUSSOC ASSOCIATION.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THORALF ISLAND.

These fragments of discarded glass bottles reworked and re-used as scrapers – have been recovered from archaeological excavations at Cocumscussoc. Most of the scrapers were made from the necks of dark green, globe-and-shaft wine bottles dating to the late 17th and early 18th century that had been split lengthwise. All show evidence of

use-related wear on their lower edges opposite the finish or top of the bottle neck, and the effects of weathering on their surfaces in the form of dulling, an opaque, iridescent patina, and corrosive pitting. These "new tools from old bottles" were probably fashioned by Native Americans, enslaved Africans, or both, who lived and worked at Cocumscussoc during the reconstruction period following King Philip's War (1675-76), though similarities to Native-made stone tools suggest a strong link to the region's Narragansett Indian Tribe.



Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files

1819.

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON, DC. S. 39874.

Enslaved and free people of color in New England established traditions that allowed them to refashion African cultural practices, create new cultural forms, and establish some control within their community at a time when much was out of their control. In doing this they found moments for celebration and socializing. Beginning around the 1750s, New England communities held annual 'Negro Elections' in June to select positions such as "Governors," "Kings," and other officials. Elected officials would be

charged with creating and maintaining social structures of accepted behavior, in some cases mediating between the enslaved and their white owners. Elected officials were well respected by the community. After the Revolutionary War, many Black veterans were voted into these positions. Depicted here is Guy Watson's pension record from the American Revolution. Watson served in the 1st Rhode Island Regiment during the war and was also elected to leadership positions through the annual festival. By the mid 1850s communities of color no longer saw the annual festival as useful to their needs in gaining equality and instead many sought legislative reform.

I Guy Watson of South Kingstown in the County of Washington in the State of Rhode & Providence Plantations do hereby certify that on solemn Oath do testify that in the late Revolutionary War in the year 1777 and 1778 I was in the Continental Army under the command of Col. Christopher Greene and was wounded in the Army with the conclusion of Peace with Great Britain in 1783 I served about five years & have fought and was discharged at Albany and since I was pleased on the 20th of Sept I have lost my discharge I further testify that I have no State or National and stand in need of aid from my country for support that I have no means of subsistence but my Pension and some times I am able to labor which I cheerfully prefer

"In creating a viable organization and recreational life for themselves [free and enslaved people of color]... used the new models to reinforce old ones; and where the models differed, they adapted those features they found most useful. In effect blacks forged a new culture within the larger Afro American culture emerging throughout the New World."

—DR. JOSEPH P. REIDY

Caesar Lyndon's accounting of cookout

August 12, 1766, manuscript.

COURTESY OF THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

This document depicts Caesar Lyndon's accounting of an August 12, 1766 cookout that he and other enslaved people from Newport organized. They spent a day in the Portsmouth countryside taking with them "a pigg to roast, wine, bread, rum, green corn, limes for punch, sugar, butter, tea and coffee." Two of the couples on this trip would later marry, including Caesar and Sarah Searing. Caesar worked as his owner's business agent during Josiah Lyndon's time as assembly clerk and later governor. On the side he ran his own loan business which people of color (free and enslaved) as well as the white community took advantage of. The profits from this business would later allow him to purchase his freedom.

Vol 10, p 83A
 Tuesday August 12th 1766. This day the following Persons took a pleasant ride out to Portsmouth are as follows Viz

Boston Vose
 Lingo Stevens & Phyllis Lyndon
 Nipton Sifton & Wife
 Prime Munton do
 Caesar Lyndon & Sarah Searing

Necessaries bought for Support of Nature are as follows Viz.

To a Pigg to roast	£8. 10. 0
To for much paid for house Room	7. 4. 0
To Wine	3. 12. 0
To Bread	1. 8. 0
To Rum	2. 10. 0
To Green Corn 60/ Limes for punch 20/	4. 0. 0
To Sugar	2. 4. 0
To Butter	1. 0. 0
To Tea 40/ Coffee 15/	2. 15. 0
To 1 pint Rum for killing Pigg	0. 10. 0
	<hr/> 33. 13. 0

6. 12
 6. 12
 6. 14
 6. 14
 33. 13. 0
 33. 13. 0

£33. 13. 0 { £21. 18. 0
 2. 15
 8 10

Newport, June 16th 1796. This may certify all whom it may
concern that the Dearest Negro Man, named Jack, who hath
lived in my Family a Number of years as a Slave, having
purchased him when young, is hereby manumitted and set
free, and is from this time his own Man, in consideration of
his past faithful Services, and his supporting himself
for the future, without any Expence to me.

Samuel Ayrault

Witness
Wm R Robinson

NEGOTIATING FREEDOM

Utilizing iconic imagery, the archive typically records white abolitionists as morally just heroes who handed freedom to the enslaved. Represented through paintings, sculpture, songs, poems, and other visual objects, the archive erases everyday moments of **agency from those in bondage**. From the moment of their capture, the enslaved were on a quest for opportunities that could lead them **towards freedom**. Freedom was a constant struggle and the enslaved negotiated spaces of freedom in big and small ways, from rebellions and forming maroon communities, to refusing to learn English and **creating moments for themselves**. Although free time was often used to carry out personal chores such as washing clothes, cleaning and garden work, the enslaved would also participate in more **leisurely activities** such as organized dances and parties. **Seeking love** was just as special to those in bondage, and larger parties provided opportunities for courtship. Free people of color were constantly negotiating what freedom meant for them in a country that did not view them as having equal rights. By rereading the archive we can see the **humanity** of these individuals and imagine **Black life beyond the constraints of slavery**. Central to this was the imagination of the enslaved and how in the midst of slavery they dreamt about freedom.



24
Commemorative cup
 c. 1834, porcelain, 55 x 56 x 70 mm.

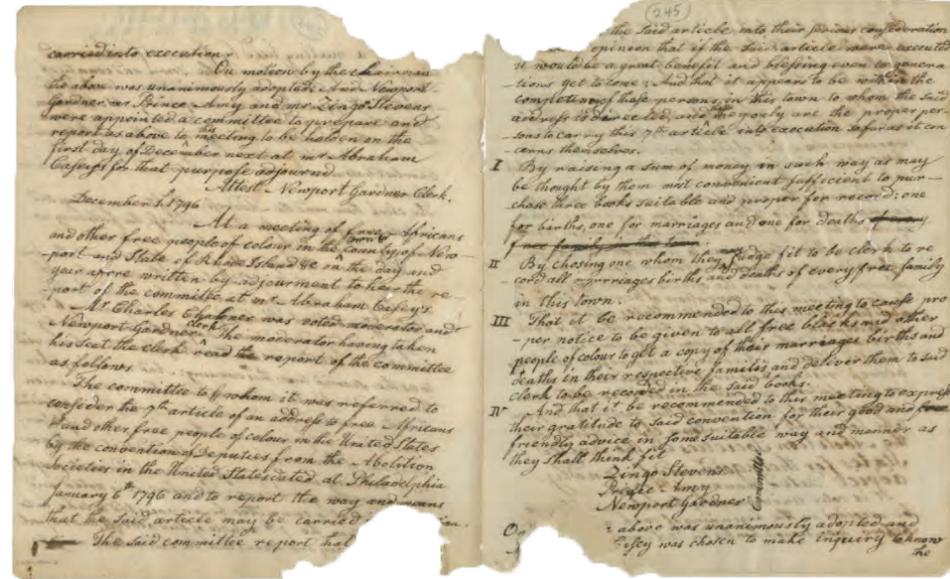
COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM GREENWICH, LONDON.

This black transfer print on a white porcelain cup illustrates a white man handing a paper to two Africans, with the text, “liberty given to the Slaves” inscribed just below the image. Despite the emancipation of slavery, the

“Antebellum Black slaves created several unique cultural forms which lightened their burden of oppression, promoted group solidarity, provided ways for verbalizing aggression, sustaining hope, building self-esteem, and often represented areas of life largely free from the control of whites.”

—PROF. JOHN W. BLASSINGAME, JR.

pursuit of freedom would remain a constant struggle for the formerly enslaved. The racially defined social practices developed and sustained throughout slavery paved the way for customary and legal prejudice towards Blacks. Although free, Blacks in the U.S would continue to fight for education, fair wages, and economic opportunity.



25
Free African Union Society of Newport Proceedings

November 10, 1796.
 COURTESY OF THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

While many descriptions of African American burials do not exist in the Colonial archive, the enslaved were remarkably innovative when it came to maintaining ancestral death practice. These customs included night-time burials, decorative graves, dancing, singing and drinking. Sometimes patchwork quilts would be laid on top of graves. Some of the first free Black societies in the North, including the *Free African Union Society of Newport, Rhode Island*, became leaders in institutionalizing decent burials for members of the community. Here members request three books to properly document births, marriages, and deaths in the Black community.



26

Portrait of Elizabeth Mumbet' Freeman

Susan Anne Livingston Ridley, 1811, ivory.
MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, BOSTON, MA,
USA / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES.

Born into slavery, Elizabeth Freeman won her freedom in a 1781 court case held in Berkshire County, Massachusetts against her owner Colonel John Ashley. Conflicting stories exist about how Freeman's case for freedom ended up in court. One states that after serving the Ashleys for decades, outrage at his wife's attempt to hit her sister with a hot kitchen shovel caused Freeman

to file a case against her owners. Another story cites that hearing the Declaration of Independence and its claim that all men are created equal inspired her to demand her freedom. Her successful case challenged the institution of slavery in the state just months after the ratification of the Massachusetts Constitution. After winning her freedom, Freeman worked as a domestic servant for her lawyer Thomas Sedgewick. Nearly a century later Freeman's famous great great grandson W.E.B. Du Bois would become a leading sociologist and foremost scholar and activist in the African American community.

“Any time, any time while I was a slave, if one minute's freedom had been offered to me, and I had been told I must die at the end of that minute, I would have taken it – just to stand one minute on God's airth [sic] a free woman – I would.”

— ELIZABETH FREEMAN

27

Slave Emancipation Society medallion

William Hackwood for Josiah Wedgwood, c. 1787.
COURTESY OF NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM,
GREENWICH, LONDON. CHIPSTONE FOUNDATION,
PHOTO, GAVIN ASHWORTH.

Josiah Wedgwood was a prominent 18th century English abolitionist. His mass-produced medallion of the kneeling African with the inscription “Am I Not a Man And a Brother?” became the most popular image of a Black person in 18th century art. It was popular for abolitionists to wear the medallion as a bracelet or as a decorative hair piece. As support of the abolition of slavery grew and spread, the Wedgwood medallion became more visible in all aspects of everyday life including clay tobacco pipes.





28

Thomas Howland

John Blanchard, c. 1850-1857, oil on wood.

COURTESY OF THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

Depicted here is Thomas Howland, the first African American elected to office in Providence. Yet despite his success, he was not afforded equal rights. In 1857 the United States Supreme Court ruled on the Dred Scott Case which stated that enslaved and free people of color could not become United States citizens. A few months later when Howland attempted to obtain a passport, his experience was featured in the *Providence Journal* and the *New York Times*. The State Department responded to his application by stating that “passports are not issued to persons of African extractions. Such persons are not deemed citizens of the United States.” That same year Howland decided to move his family to Liberia, hoping to create a better life for himself, his wife, and daughter.



29

George Thomas Downing

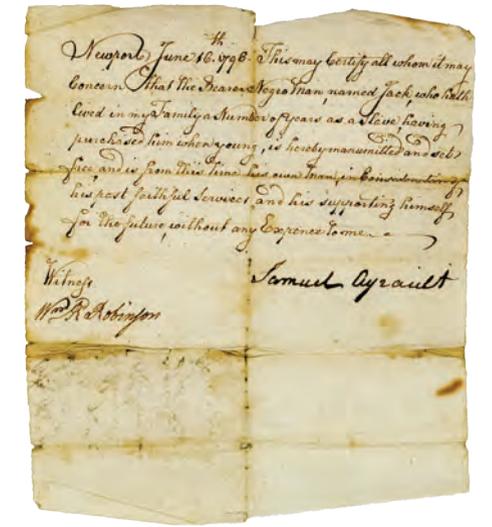
Businessman and Civil Rights Leader

c. 1880s, engraving.

COURTESY OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS AND PRINTS DIVISION, SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE, THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, ASTOR, LENOX AND TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

George T. Downing used his success in the hospitality industry and respected status in the community to influence legislation in support of the Black community. His father owned a popular oyster restaurant that was frequented by New York’s elite. The restau-

rant is also known to have been a stop on the Underground Railroad from the 1830s-1860s. After Downing moved to Rhode Island to establish his own branch of the family business, he continued his advocacy for abolition nationally and worked on many other campaigns to promote civil rights including universal suffrage and helping to found the Colored National Labor Union. He also mobilized campaigns to integrate Rhode Island’s schools using his own wealth. Downing’s efforts for equal rights were not without risks; in what is believed to be a hate crime, his Sea Girt Hotel in Newport was burned down in 1860 just six years after its founding. Despite the discrimination and violence he faced, Downing disagreed ideologically with the Back-to-Africa movement, believing that freedom and equality were best sought through legislative reform and community efforts to mobilize change in America.



30

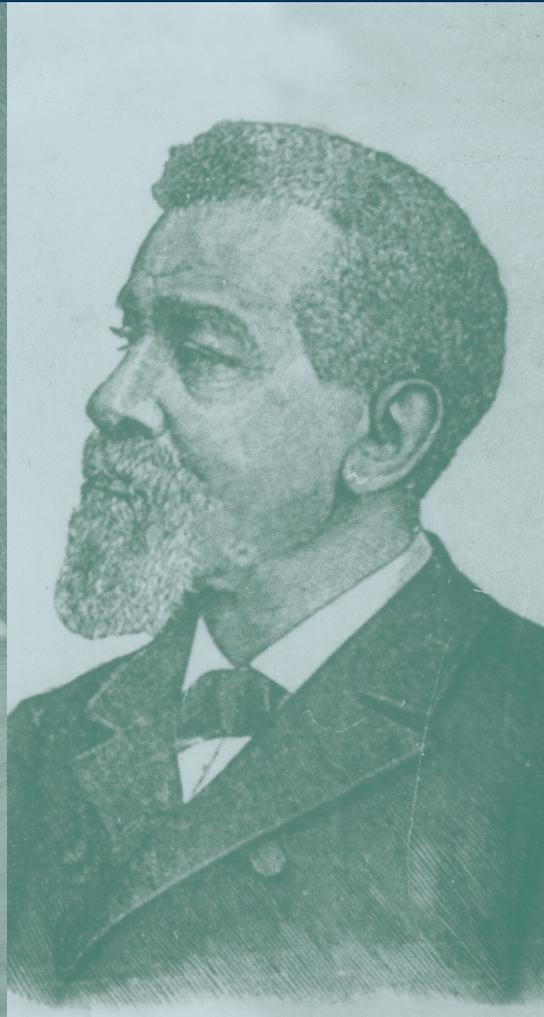
Manumission record

freeing “Jack,” the slave of Samuel Ayrault

June 16, 1796.

COURTESY OF THE NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

We don’t know the particulars of Jack’s enslaved experience or how he gained his freedom, but we can imagine this document of manumission was a prized possession. Despite no longer being held in bondage, Jack would have found it challenging to obtain the same rights as his white neighbors.



SELECTED RESOURCES

Augusto, Geri. "Plants of Bondage, Liberation Flora and Colonial Sciences – Reflections for STS." In Chakanetsa Mavhunga (Ed.), *What Do Science, Technology, Innovation Mean from Africa?* Cambridge: MIT Press, May 2017.

Bibb, Henry, and Charles J. Heglar. *Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*. N.p.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.

Blassingame, John W. *Slave testimony: two centuries of letters, speeches, interviews, and autobiographies*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009.

Blassingame, John W. *The Slave Community: Plantation life in the Antebellum South*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Clark-Pujara, Christy. *Dark Work: The Business of Slavery in Rhode Island*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.

Finkelman, Paul. *Encyclopedia of African American history, 1619-1895: from the colonial period to the age of Frederick Douglass*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Geake, Robert A and Spears, Loren M. *From Slaves to Soldiers: The 1st Rhode Island Regiment in the American Revolution*. Pennsylvania: Westholme Publishing, LLC, 2016.

Hamilton, Douglas J., and Robert J. Blyth. *Representing slavery: art, artefacts and archives in the collections of the National Maritime Museum*. Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2007.

Melish, Joanne Pope. *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Reidy, Joseph P. "'Negro Election Day' & Black Community Life in New England, 1750-1860." Cliomar Corporation, 1978.

Rhode Island Black Heritage Society. *Creative Survival: the Providence Black Community in the 19th Century*. Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, 1985.

Stewart, Rowena. *A Heritage Discovered: Blacks in Rhode Island*. The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, c. 1970.

Youngken, Richard C. *African Americans in Newport*. Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission & Rhode Island Black Heritage Society. Second Printing: the Newport Historical Society, 1998.

Wilford, John Noble. "Old Pipes Offer New View Of Black Life in Colonies." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 11 July 1988. Web. 02 May 2017.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ana Flores

Erin Wells & Elise Kirk
EXHIBITION & GRAPHIC DESIGN

Ben Kaplan
EXHIBITION INSTALLER

Renee Neely
ARCHIVIST

Prof. Geri Augusto

Sherri Cummings
GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCHER

Thierry Gentis
HAFFENREFFER MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Maya Finoh
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCHER

Thoralf Island

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCHER

Dawn Kimbrel
HAFFENREFFER MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Sophie Kupetz
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCHER AND
ADMINISTRATIVE HELP

Alexandra Peck
GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCHER

Prof. Matthew Reilly
VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF
SLAVERY & JUSTICE

Prof. Patricia Rubertone

The Students in Professor Rubertone's
Material Culture Practicum
(ANTHROPOLOGY 1621)

Myacah Sampson
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCHER

Cocumscussoc Association

Prof. Robert Emlen

Robert Geake

J.D. Kay

Prof. Steve Lubar

Marjory O'Toole

Joanne Pope Melish

Ron Potvin

Dr. Colin Porter

Timothy Sandiford

South County History Center



BROWN

Center for the Study of

SLAVERY
& **JUSTICE**