

# *Abolition Adventure!*

*An interactive journey  
through the history of  
slavery and abolition in  
Rhode Island*

# Introduction

In the 1600s, colonists from England began to arrive in the American colonies. One of these colonies was Rhode Island. Rhode Island was founded by Roger Williams as a place of freedom. Williams had been forced to leave Massachusetts because of religious differences.

Around the same time, the first slaves came to America. During this time, many in America, as well as around the globe, felt that it was alright to hold others in slavery. The majority of these people were brought to the colonies from Africa.

In 1652, Rhode Island passed a law that said that no one could be a slave for more than 10 years. However, many Rhode Islanders ignored this rule. It was not until after the Revolutionary War that Rhode Island abolished slavery for good.

# Choose a Character

You have the chance to be a part of the movement to end slavery in Rhode Island. The debate over slavery in the state is embodied in two well-known Rhode Islanders, John and Moses Brown. John and Moses were part of a big family. They and their brothers often went into business together.

In this game, you get to be part of that family. Type in your name to start the adventure.

INSERT YOUR NAME HERE

# Point System

Each decision you make affects the rest of your journey. Based on the choices you make, you will be awarded coins or doves. Coins represent material wealth. Doves represent spiritual fulfillment. Choose wisely.



# *The Voyage of the Sally*

*In 1765, John and Moses Brown, along with their brothers, decided to embark on an important journey. They decided to fund a voyage to the coast of Africa to buy slaves to sell in the Caribbean.*



# Make your decision



John Brown

My brothers are preparing to enter the slave trade. I am not sure if I will join, it does not seem right to me.

We are outfitting a ship to journey to Africa. We will join the slave trade and become prosperous.



Moses Brown

# Choice 1: John



You gain  
one stack  
of coins.



Esek Hopkins, your captain, decides to spend a number months on the Gold Coast of Africa, gathering slaves. Over that time, many get sick and some die. When he decides to move on to the Caribbean, a mutiny occurs. Overall, the voyage is a failure. But John presses on and becomes a successful slave trader and general businessman.

# Choice 2: Moses

*Despite reservations, you fund the slaving voyage with your brothers. It is a disaster. Disease and mutiny cause rampant loss of life. You decide to leave the industry for good.*



*You gain one dove.*



# The Non-Importation Act



In the 1770s the British Empire began to levy taxes on its American colonies. The British Parliament wanted American colonists to shoulder more of the financial burden of running the empire. Americans, however, felt that it was unfair for Parliament to tax them without any representatives from American colonies.

# Make your decision



John Brown

The African slave trade is wrong. The British are taxing us unfairly. Stopping the slave trade will send a message to the British and is morally right.



Moses Brown

The British are taxing us unfairly. To protest we will stop importing slaves from the British Empire. But, if we stop buying British goods, we will also stop a large portion of our slave trade.

# Choice 1: John



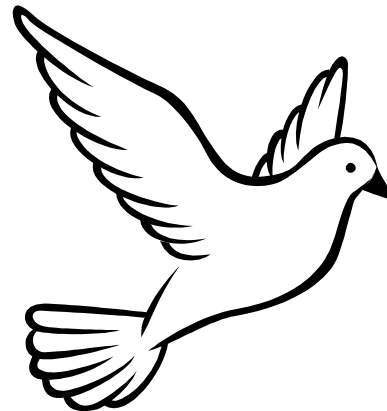
You gain  
one stack  
of coins.



The non-importation bill passes. You temporarily stop importing slaves to send a message to the British Parliament. This revolutionary spirit leads to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. Newport is blockaded by the royal navy and Providence becomes the center of Rhode Island commerce.

# Choice 2: Moses

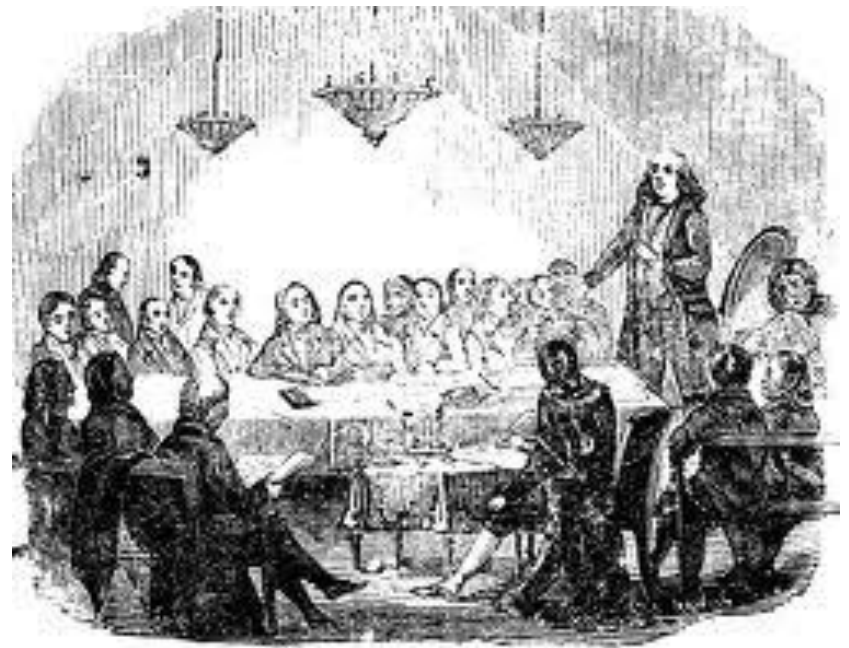
*A small victory is won with the stoppage of importation into the colony. However, the law does not ban the slave trade entirely. Further, many supported the measure out of anger with the British government. It will take more to change the minds of Rhode Islanders about the evils of slavery.*



*You gain one dove.*

# Gradual Emancipation

After the victory of the Revolutionary War Rhode Island was in an economic depression. During the war, the British had invaded Newport and cut off trade. The war had also embedded the values of freedom and liberty for all in the American people. Those values were the foundation of the new country. Rhode Islanders were faced with the difficult decision of how to address slavery in their own society.



# Make your decision



John Brown

We fought the British to gain freedom and independence. We should not keep those values from others, including slaves.



Moses Brown

The British blockaded Newport during the war. The slave trade is our most profitable industry. It will help Rhode Islanders to fix the economy.

# Choice 1: John



You gain  
one stack  
of coins.



Defeat! Despite your best efforts, the gradual emancipation bill has passed. However, your efforts helped to remove a clause banning Rhode Islanders from participating in the slave trade.

# Choice 2: Moses

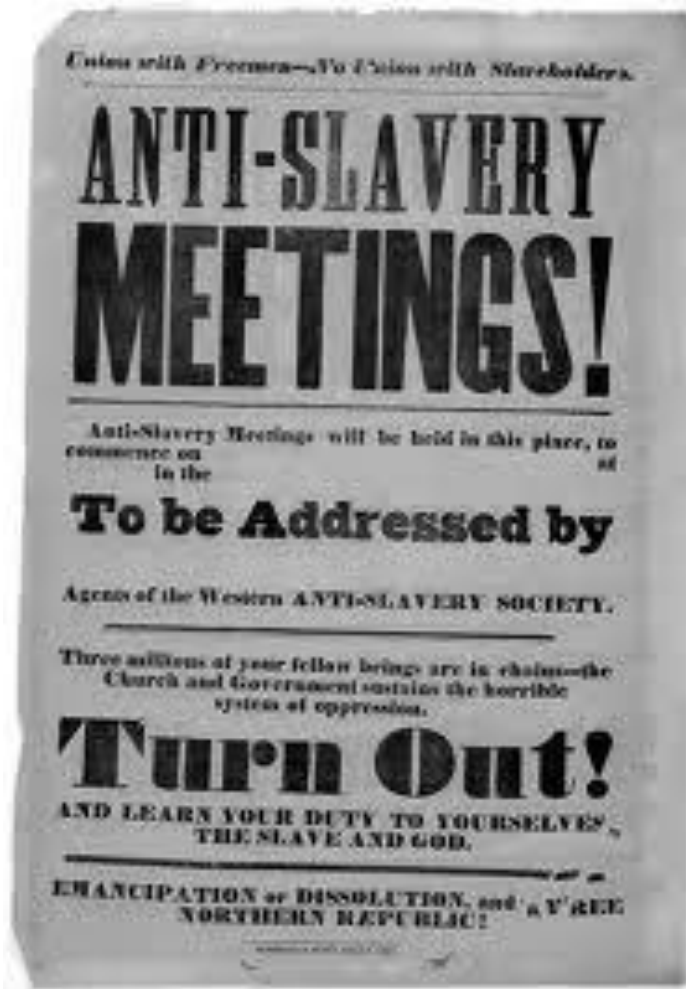
A victory! Gradual emancipation has passed. All African Americans born after March 1, 1784 will be free. This law, combined with the non-importation act will spell the end of slavery in Rhode Island in the future. The next step is to stop slavery in the rest of the United States.



You gain  
one dove.



# Restriction of the Slave Trade



In 1786, only two years after gradual emancipation had been enacted, abolitionists in Rhode Island turned their sights towards the stronghold of slavery in the state, the slave trade. Before the Revolutionary War, nearly 70 percent of trading voyages had departed from Newport. After the victory of the revolution, many Rhode Islanders hoped that the renewal of the trade would help to repair their economy.

# Make your decision



John Brown

*Is it not a contradiction that we fought the British Empire for freedom and liberty but we now make a living from taking freedom from other men?*

*The slave trade is necessary to renew our economy. Without it many in Rhode Island will live in poverty. It will help fulfill the dreams of our revolution.*



Moses Brown

# Choice 1: John



You gain  
one stack  
of coins.



The slave trade is  
abolished. Many  
traders seek to  
work around the  
new restrictions.  
However, John  
Brown decides to  
pursue other  
merchant ventures.

# Choice 2: Moses

*The slave trade is abolished. Rhode Island has proven to be full of true patriots. Individuals who wish to fulfill the promises of the American Revolution for all people.*



*You gain  
one dove.*

# Abolition Society

Although Rhode Island had passed a law that would eventually end slavery, many wanted a more immediate conclusion. Moses Brown decided to start a society to advocate for a true end to the slave trade.



# *Make your decision*



*John Brown*

*The slave trade is wrong.  
We cannot enslave other  
human beings.*



*Moses Brown*

*We cannot abolish the  
slave trade; it is an  
important part of our  
economy.*

# Choice 1: John



You gain  
one stack  
of coins.



The abolition society  
is created. However,  
you have helped to  
publicize some of the  
benefits of slavery to  
Rhode Island. The  
slave trade will  
continue for a  
number of years  
despite the gradual  
extinction of holding  
slaves inside the  
state's borders.

# Choice 2: Moses

*The abolition society is created. Rhode Island is quickly moving towards the fulfillment of the American dream of liberty, freedom and equality for all.*



*You gain one dove.*

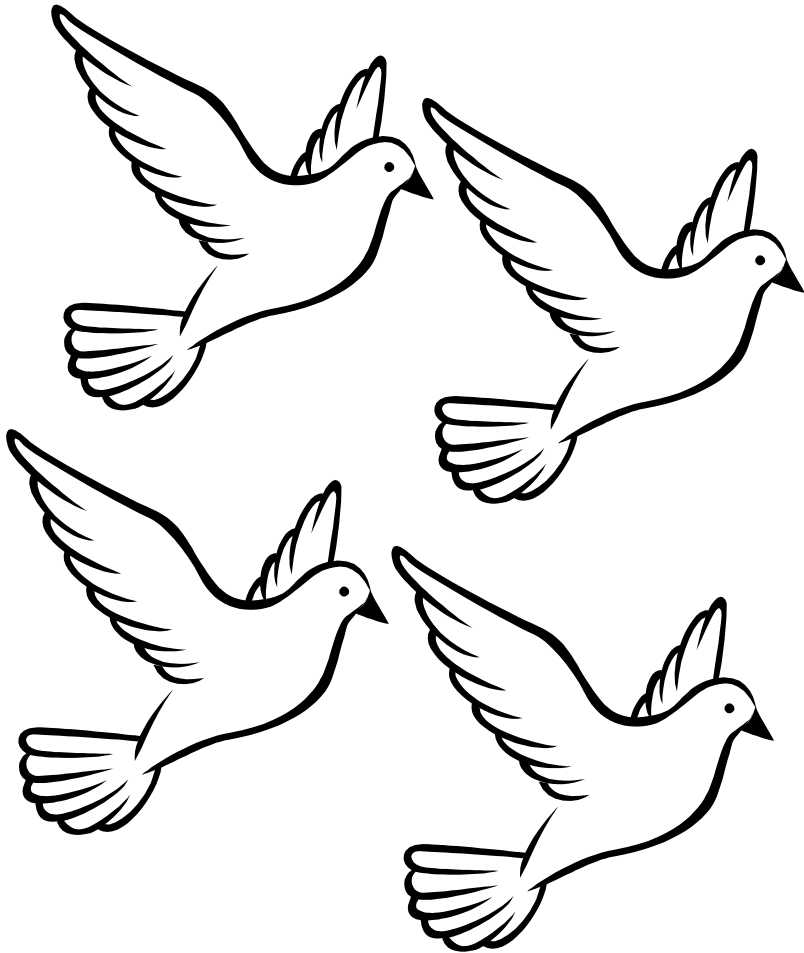


# Result 1: Coins

*You have followed the path of commerce. Taking advantage of the seafaring trade in Rhode Island, you chose to pursue the slave trade. You gain material wealth at the expense of spiritual fulfillment.*



# Result 2: Doves



*You chose the path of righteousness, abolition. You work hard to right a wrong that you see in early American society. It is a difficult, uphill battle but you know that you have chosen the moral path.*

# Result 3: Coins and Doves

*You have chosen the middle road. You dabble in the slave trade, but do not invest in the venture. Likewise, you listen to the arguments of abolitionists, but reserve final judgment.*



# Conclusion

The gradual emancipation bill and the restriction of the slave trade spelled the end of slavery in Rhode Island on legal grounds. Unfortunately, some Rhode Islanders chose not to follow the laws. The slave trade continued out of Newport into the 1820s. It even surpassed 1808, the year the United States Constitution banned the slave trade for the entire country.

Slavery in Rhode Island was a decisive issue. Much like the rest of the country, Rhode Islanders had made investments in the slave trade that were difficult to give up. However, one should remember that Rhode Island, despite some bumps in the road, was able to end both slavery and the slave trade within its borders in the political sphere.

Unfortunately, the rest of the country was not so lucky. As other states began to work towards abolition, the two sides became more divided. It would take the Civil War to end slavery in the United States of America.

# References

- Mack Thompson, *Moses Brown: Reluctant Reformer* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962)
- Charles Rappleye, *Sons of Providence: The Brown Brothers, the Slave Trade and the American Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006)