

Just and Right as Any Trade



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Background

Most high school students enter the history classroom with an understanding of slavery that is primarily geographical. They view it as a “southern issue” and overlook the role slavery played in the North. This unit uses varied primary sources to teach how slavery impacted the northern colonies and eventually the United States. The history of Rhode Island mirrors the nation.

By 1760, New England coastal merchants from Newport, Rhode Island to Portsmouth, New Hampshire were making a living in the slave trade. Four Rhode Island brothers, Nicholas, Joseph, John and Moses Brown, had ventured into the slave trade with the voyage of the *Sally* in 1764-65. This voyage was plagued with misfortune and it ended in great financial loss for the Brown family. It was also an example of the devastation and degradation of the slave trade on humanity. By the late 1700’s this trade was waning in most of New England except for Rhode Island.

Although John had a number of other successful business ventures, he was the only Brown brother to continue directly in the trade. His brother Moses was instrumental in bringing Samuel Slater to Rhode Island and establishing the first water powered spinning mill in America in 1793. The mill manufactured cotton yarn. After the death of his first wife, Moses joined the Quaker Society and became a well-known abolitionist in New England.

Standards

RI K-12 GSEs for Civics & Government and Historical Perspectives/RI History **High School Proficiency Grades 9-12**

HP 1: History is an account of human activities that is interpretive in nature.

HP 1–1 Students *act as historians*, using a variety of tools (e.g., artifacts and primary and secondary sources) by...

- a. formulating historical questions, obtaining, analyzing, evaluating historical primary and secondary print and non-print sources
- b. explaining how historical facts and historical interpretations may be different, but are related
- c. identifying, describing, or analyzing multiple perspectives on an historical trend or event

HP 1–2: Students *interpret history* as a series of connected events with multiple cause-effect relationships, by

- a. explaining cause and effect relationships in order to sequence and summarize events, make connections between a series of events, or compare/contrast events
- b. interpreting and constructing visual data (e.g., timelines, charts, graphs, flowchart, historical films, political cartoons) in order to explain historical continuity and change

HP 2: History is a chronicle of human activities, diverse people, and the societies they form

HP 2– 1: Students *connect the past with the present* by

- a. explaining origins of major historical events
- b. identifying and linking key ideas and concepts and their enduring implications
- c. analyzing and evaluating how national and world events have impacted Rhode land and how Rhode Island has impacted national and world events

HP 2 – 2: Students *chronicle events and conditions* by...

- a. creating narratives based on a particular historical point of view
- b. synthesizing information from multiple sources to formulate an historical interpretation

HP 2– 3: Students *show understanding of change over time* by...

- a. tracing patterns chronologically in history to describe changes on domestic, social, or economic life
- b. documenting various groups and their traditions that have remained constant over time

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Background

The document to follow is a letter written by John Brown to his brother Moses. The letter was written on November 27, 1786. John had returned to the African slave trade in 1785, after a sixteen year lapse, and he was planning another voyage. Moses had been concerned about this latest plan and had expressed his apprehension to his brother. John's letter is a response to his brother's worries; it explains as well as justifies his actions. His ship, the *Providenc*, sailed for Africa a few days after this letter was written.

The letter is in John's hand and is followed by four transcribed passages. The actual letter is difficult for the 21st Century student to read, and the transcribed passages may still leave you with questions, but it will be easier to decipher. There are a number of abbreviations and misspelled words. Some of the words that seem to be misspelled may also be just an alternate spelling no longer in use.

1. Read odd looking words aloud, phonetically. Maybe the sound will help you recognize an oddly-spelled word.
2. Return to the document several times after leaving it for awhile. Sometimes words you could not recognize before will seem simple to read later.

As you read each passage, use the graphic organizer on the following page to list and define misspelled words or words with an alternate spelling. Then go back to the passage re-read with your graphic organizer in hand and answer the document analysis questions.

Just and Right as Any Trade

Graphic Organizer

[illegible]

RH. 24 (205)

Providence Novem^r 27. 1786

Dr. Brother

Your Esteemed Favour was this Day at Dinner handed me by your Son, I have not yet had time to peruse the Freeteer^e You was so kind as to Accompany with the Letter but will do it soon, by beginning it this Evening. You mention that you had heard, or last Evening, I had it in contemplation the Sundry an other Vessels to Africa in the Slave Trade, its true that I have not only had an other Voyage in contemplation but have been preparing the Cargo for this A.M. part this Day before I had your^r Veneration. in the Ballis had before I left the Captin & Mole, I have no Doubt of your Sincerity in your Exhortations to Discourage the Slave Trade, and did I consider it as you do I would by no Means be concerned in it, but from the best Information I can get & that has been from Exact Numbers the Slaves are positively better off, that is brot, from the Coast than those who are Left behind or than those would be was they not brot away, more especially those who are Caried among the French, as I propose this Vessel as well as the one already gone will Land them on Hispaniola w^h are all Accounts agree they are better Treated than in any part of the English West Indies, this Trade has been permitted by the Supreme Governour of all things for the ^{most} humane & = riel, and whenever I am convinced, as you are, that it is ^{not} in the Sight of God, I will immediately Desist, but while it is only allowed by the Supreme Governour of all States but by all the Nations of Europe, and perhaps the most of any by that very Government.

Brown, John to Brown, Moses; November 27, 1786

In 1785, John Brown returned to the African slave trade after a sixteen-year hiatus. His decision deeply distressed his brother Moses, prompting a correspondence between the two. In late 1786, Moses learned of John's intention to send another ship to Africa. He immediately wrote to his brother, urging him to reconsider. John responded with a letter, defending his decision and offering various arguments in favor of slave trading. His ship, the *Providence*, sailed for the West Africa a few days later. The following pages are transcribed passages from the letter.

Document #1

Providence Novem 27.th 1786

Dr. Brother

Your Esteemed Favour was this Day at Diner handed me by your Son,.....YOU mention that you had heard, as Last Eveng, I had it in Contemplation the Sendg. an Other Vessell to Affrica in the slave Trade, its true that I have not onley had an Other Voyage in contemplation but have been prepairing the cargo for this 4 Mo. past & this Day before I Recd. yours began takg. in the Ballis havg before Shipt the captin & Mate, I have no Doubt of your sinsearity, in Your Exurtions to Discorage the Slave Trade, and did I Consider it as You do I would by no means be concernd in it, but from the best Information I can Git & that has beene from Grait Numbers the Slaves are positively better off, that is brot., from the coast then those who are Left behind or then those would be was they not brot. Away, More aspetially those who are caried Among the French, as I propose this Vessill as Well as the One Allredy Gone will Land them on High spanolla ware all Accounts Agree they are better treated then in Aney part of the English West Indies.....

Document Analysis Questions

Answers should be 2-3 complete sentences including examples from the passage.

1. What is John Brown's reaction to his brother's concern over his latest business venture?
2. Why does John Brown think that the slaves taken from Africa are better off than those who are left behind?
3. To what port are the slaves being carried by Brown's ship? In his view is this better for the slaves than slaves brought to the English West Indies and why?

Document #2

Providence Novem 27.th 1786

Very people who Appears the Most Active in Writing and Clammering Against the Trade I cannot thinke this state ought to Decline the Trade I fulley Agree with you that no past Proffit that I have purtookein the trade can be My Inducement having Lost & thar very Graitly in almost Every Voyage to Guiney I have beene concernd in but you are sencible much property has beene Acquired by this Trade from Newport, I Lately heard severil of their principle people say that the Merchants of Newport Very scarsly Ever cleard any property in Aney other Trade & that all the Estates that had Ever beene Acquired in that Town had beene Got in the Guiney Trades, it may be as you suppose Determind by that power which presides over all Events that no Inhabitant of this Town shall Ever prosper in the slave Trade,.....

Document Analysis Questions

Answers should be 2-3 complete sentences including examples from the passage.

1. Another term for the slave trade is the *Guiney Trade*, where does the term come from? Although John Brown uses the term interchangeably with *Slave Trade* do you think “Guiney Trace” is a less pejorative term? Why do you think John Brown might be using it instead of “Slave Trade”?
2. Has the slave trade been profitable for John Brown in the past? Why does he continue with the trade?
3. John Brown looks to the success of the Newport merchants as business model to emulate. Explain his reasons.

Document #3

Providence Novem 27.th 1786

I owe an Enormus sum of Money in Europe & am striveg. in Every Trade Which Appears Lawfull &- Right to me, to pay as Much of the Debt as possable Dureing MY Life time as I Wish Most Ardently to Leave MY Famely Less Invoulved.In. Debt then is now the case, You are sencible I have Tryd the Tobacco Trade, have a Ship NoW Gone to Verginnia for a Load, have Tryd the Fishery havg fifteen schooners in the Buissiness, but have not yet beene So Fortunate as to Lessen the Debt, Should the Brigg I am now Fitting to Guiney & the Snow cap. cooke who saild in July Last the Ship capt Sheldon now Gone to Virginnia &. bound to France together with the Fisherman, which I propose shall all sail Very Early in the spring in order to Hake up a cargo of the best & Earlyest spring Fish for Billbo, I say Should all these succeede but Tollorably well I hope to Discharge a Very Large propotion of MY Debts,

Document Analysis Questions

Answers should be 2-3 complete sentences including examples from the passage.

1. What is John Brown financial status at this time? How did this influence his involvement in the slave trade?
2. In addition to the slave trade what were some of his other business ventures?

Document #4

Providence Novem 27.th 1786

and I do Assure you I have not nor never had one Feeling in my Mind but that the Guiney Trade, or the slave Trade as you More Explissetly call it, was and is as Just & Right as as Aney Trade I am or Ever was concernd.....Double Intention nay Three Fold contrediction to the professions of some owners of vessills 1st if the slave Trade is Rong why will the Men Who thlnkes so incorage it by sending for the produce Raised & made by those slaves So Rongfully & unritchously Imported from their own Native country, are they Not doing as bad as tho they was to Undertake to Incorage A Theif by purchessing his Goods tho they knew they was Stole from an Honest Man 2.dly to thus Incorage the Trade of carying Slaves to the West Indies have they Not coverd their property with Fals papers & by this Means Indeverd to Disseive the people they was bound Among, by bringing their produce to this country Directly Conterary to their Laws & 3dly. to Introduce the produce of the English Islands In to this state Under Different Cullers & Different papers their others being conseal'd, & all this Done by Owners & a captin who are So Consheus bound as to use None but the plain langwige & better to cover their Wickednrss they Appear Among the Foremust to write against the Guiney Trade & The Lord deliver me from such wolves in Sheeps Cloathing,

Document Analysis Questions

Answers should be 2-3 complete sentences including examples from the passage.

1. John Brown states that some think the slave trade is wrong, but he believes that some of these individuals are just as bad as those they condemn. Why?
2. He states that the aforementioned are *wolves in sheeps cloathing*. What does he mean by this statement?

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Document Analysis Questions

John Brown discusses three examples of complicity and hypocrisy in the slave trade. Using your own words, explain each in 2-3 sentences.

<p>1.</p> <p>1st if the slave Trade is Rong why will the Men Who thlnkes so incorage it by sending for the produce Raised & made by those slaves So Rongfully & unritchously Imported from their own Native country, are they Not doing as bad as tho they was to Undertake to Incorage A Theif by purchessing his Goods tho they knew they was Stole from an Honest Man</p>	
<p>2.</p> <p>2.dly to thus Incorage the Trade of carying Slaves to the West Indies have they Not coverd their property with Fals papers & by this Means Indeverd to Disseive the people they was bound Among, by bringing their produce to this country Directly Conterary to their Laws</p>	
<p>3.</p> <p>3dly. to Introduce the produce of the English Islands In to this state Under Different Cullers & Different papers their others being conseal'd, & all this Done by Owners & a captin who are So Consheus bound as to use None but the plain langwige & better to cover their Wickednrss they Appear Among the Foremust to write against the Guiney Trade</p>	



Engraving from *The Envoy from Free Hearts to the Free*
(Pawtucket: Juvenile Eman Society, 1840)

RIHS Collection (RHi X3 6716)

Document #5

Just and Right as Any Trade

Image Analysis Worksheet

Study the image for 2 minutes. First look at the image as a whole and than examine the individual details.

- Imagine the picture is divided into three segments. Use the following grid to examine the three parts of the picture.

Objects:	Objects:	Objects:
Activities:	Activities:	Activities:
People:	People:	People:

- What is the most important historical information this image provides? Be sure to cite specific evidence from the image. Your answer should be 1-2 paragraphs in length

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DBQ Questions

Complete one of the following essay choices, your essay should be 3-4 paragraphs in length and include quotes and examples from the documents.

Refer to the background information, the documents and the document analysis questions.

1. John Brown wrote the following statement about his brother, knowing that his brother did not approve of this involvement in the slave trade:

I have no Doubt of your sinsearity, in Your Exurtions to Discourage the Slave Trade, and did I Consider it as You do I would by no means be concernd

Write a letter from Moses to John explaining to him that his involvement in human trafficking is wrong and it is not *just and right as any trade*. Directly address John's arguments.

2. John Brown, in his letter to his brother Moses, states the following:

Feeling in my Mind but that the Guiney Trade, or the slave Trade as you More Explissetly call it, was and is as Just & Right as Aney Trade I am or Ever was concernd...

This statement seems to be a justification for his involvement in human trafficking. It is telling that in this statement he refers to the Guiney Trade and pointedly expresses the fact that his brother explicitly refers to this business as the slave trade. Write an essay from John's point of view.