

A Name of My Own

Objective:

This lesson shows how Americans of African descent were named by those who enslaved them in an effort to further minimize their culture and connections to their homeland. It also shows how resilient the enslaved were in keeping their culture, their own true names and those of their ancestors alive in America.

Introduction:

Many of the first and second generations of enslaved Africans bore their own names across the water. These included names like Cuff or Cuffe, (meaning Friday in their homeland), or Cudjo and Kunta. However, by the mid 18th century, children born among those already enslaved were named by the enslaved owners.

RIDE Social Studies Standards

SS4.4.2 Rhode Island participation in the American Revolution

Connection to the following Rhode Island Anchor Standards:

CG.RL Rules and Laws, CG.RR Rights and Responsibilities, H.CC Change/Continuity, H.HP Historical Perspectives, H.IG Individuals/Groups, G.WST The World in Spatial Terms, E.SA Scarcity/Abundance

Guiding Questions for Instruction:

1. What were some of the names brought from Africa by enslaved people?
2. What were some of the names that were given enslaved people by their owners?
3. How did enslaved people keep their own names and language alive?

Note for Educators:

This lesson may be divided into two separate lessons, depending upon the time taken to research documents online, and discuss those primary documents provided.

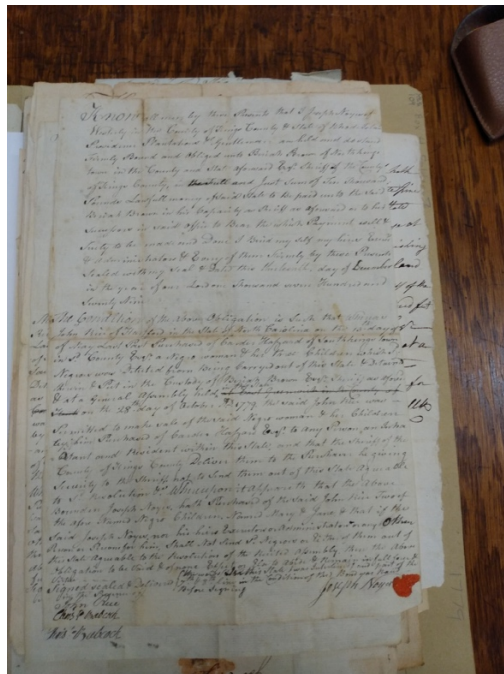
I. A Name of My Own:

Among the early ledgers that recorded the names of the enslaved of Rhode Island was merchant Aaron Lopez of Newport. His ledger recorded the names of enslaved people who labored for him, as well as others in the colony. Through his ledger, and other primary documents, we find that many of those first Africans who were forcibly brought from Africa, brought their own names with them to North America. These names were often handed down to the first generations of Africans enslaved in the colony. According to historian John C. Insoe,

“Quash, Cuffee, Mingo, Sambo, Mustapha, and Sukey were among the most common recorded. Enslaved people often transferred such names to later generations in modified form or relied on African naming traditions, such as "day names" or names reflecting the order of birth among siblings”.

Document 1: Beriah Brown Indenture

Dated May 18, 1761 An agreement made between Beriah Brown, high sheriff of North Kingstown and Gordon Hoxie for the enslavement of “a negro man named **Quacco.** “

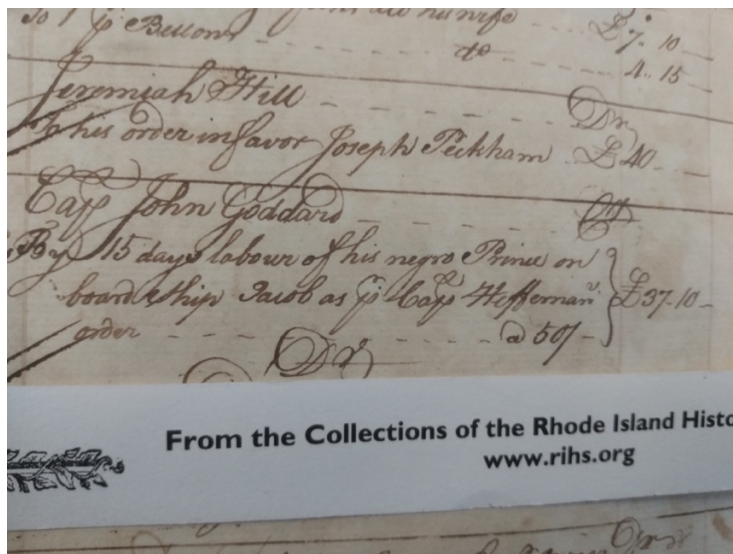


By the mid 18th century, many of the enslaved people in Rhode Island were now born into slavery on the plantations of wealthy land owners, whose large farms took up great parts of

South County, and exported livestock, timber, bricks, hay, and barreled mutton to sugar plantation owners in the West Indies.

Many of these wealthy landowners and merchants sought above all else, to emulate the lifestyle of those Lords and Ladies in their homeland, for America was still a colony of Great Britain. The boy named Prince Updike was likely born on the Updike plantation, the son of a pair of enslaved individuals among the men and women Daniel Updike inherited from his father Lodowick in 1737. The name Prince was commonly used by owners of enslaved children.

Document 2: "His Negro Prince"



An education in classic literature being part of that lifestyle, owners of the enslaved created a fashion of naming children born into slavery after classical characters or rulers, even for towns or places; a fashion that extended into America and flourished throughout the period of enslavement.

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PROVIDENCE, March 30, 1763.
RUN away from **MARK ANTHONY**
D'WOLF, of *Bristol*, a Negro Man named
YORK, a very black looking Fellow, strait
 limb'd, well set, and speaks good English.
 He had on when he went away, a blue Broad-cloth
 Coat, a red great Coat, and a Pair of black
 Plush Breeches.—Whoever will take up said Negro,
 and deliver him to the Subscriber, in Providence, or
 otherwise secure him, so that his Master may have
 him again, shall have **FOUR DOLLARS** Reward,
 and all necessary Charges paid, by
WILLIAM PROUD.
 N. B. He has been lately seen at Cranston, and
 other Country Places near Providence.

Popular place names given to enslaved boys included Boston, Newport, Bristol, and London.

The most common classical names assigned to enslaved boys were Caesar, Cato, Nero, and Prince. Newborn girls might be named Athena, Circe, or Persephone. In America, Biblical names, or, names taken from people in the Bible became especially popular. Boys might be named Sampson, Job, Moses, or Pharo (for the Egyptian Pharaoh). Names of the Apostles such as John, James, Luke, and Thomas. Girls might be named Bathsheba, Hannah, Ruth, or Mary.

Document 3: Inventory of Enslaved People of Daniel Updike's Inventory 1757

Guiding Questions:

How many enslaved individuals (including children) did Updike own?

What are some of the "classical" names given to those enslaved people?

How many authentic African names are listed among those enslaved people?

| | | Brought over |
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| | Reference Volume at notice | 300 |
| | Ch... | 600 |
| | Moses | 600 |
| | Joseph | 600 |
| | David | 600 |
| | Samuel | 500 |
| | Daniel | 600 |
| | Mingo | 400 |
| | Clara | 400 |
| | James | 400 |
| | Colar | 300 |
| | Donna | 100 |
| | Paul | 50 |
| | Prince | 50 |
| | Luc | 500 |
| | Linda | 500 |
| | Bridget | 500 |
| | Notie 2 1/2 years old | 100 |
| On the Farm | To 2 Mares & Calfs | 300 |
| | To 2 Mares 1000 To 30 200 | 300 |
| | To 10 Year Old Horse 200. 600 2 Year old Mares 200 | 100 |
| | To 10 Year | 300 |