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## PENNSYLVANIA'S ANTISLAVERY PIONEERS, 1688-1776

William Penn is justly famous for his political and religious liberalism. In many ways he was far ahead of his time. One year after he received the Pennsylvania grant from King Charles II in 1681, he endowed the projected colony with its noteworthy Frame of Government (1682). A relatively democratic political structure was established, a bill of rights was specified, capital punishment was limited to treason and murder, and religious freedom was provided for all believers in God. Especially renowned was Penn's just and friendly policy toward the Indians, celebrated in Benjamin West's familiar painting. In 1689 he gave orders for the establishment of a grammar school in Philadelphia, which became the basis for today's distinguished William Penn Charter School. In 1693 he published *An Essay toward the Present and Future Peace of Europe*, proposing a league of nations. In 1697 he presented a plan for union of the American colonies, more than half a century before Franklin's Albany Plan. A century before the treatises on temperance by Dr. Benjamin Rush were published, Penn advocated moderation in the use of alcoholic beverages. Like other Quakers, he encouraged the participation of women in church business. However, there was one blind spot in his liberal vision: he was a slaveholder, and he permitted slavery to mar his "Holy Experiment." While his will of 1701 provided that his own slaves were to be freed at his death, it was superseded by a new will in 1711, which made no mention of the subject.<sup>1</sup>

The number of slaves in Pennsylvania was never large compared with those held in the Southern colonies. It is impossible to give exact figures prior to the Federal Census of 1790, but it has been reliably estimated

that in 1721 there were 60,000 whites and 5,000 blacks in Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> By 1750 the colony's population was about 150,000, of whom perhaps five to eight percent were of African ancestry.<sup>3</sup> According to a modern estimate, Philadelphia had a total population of 16,000 in 1767, including 1,400 slaves. At that time, when slavery was at its peak, bondsmen constituted 8.8% of the city's population.<sup>4</sup> In colonial South Carolina, on the other hand, slaves actually outnumbered the white population by two to one. Pennsylvania also had fewer slaves than New Jersey, and only half as many as New York. They were held chiefly in the area near Philadelphia, but by the time of the American Revolution there were a considerable number in southwestern Pennsylvania, an area settled by Virginians. Slaves were owned mainly by the English and Scotch-Irish settlers; the Germans generally held no slaves.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the slaves in Pennsylvania did not come directly from Africa, but rather from the British West Indies, where they underwent a "seasoning" process. They entered Pennsylvania through the port of Philadelphia. The usual price for an adult slave was about forty pounds sterling, but this was often paid by means of commodities like grain and lumber. The average Pennsylvania slaveholder held only a small number of them. The colony had few large plantations. As in most of the northern colonies, the masters generally worked closely with their black farm hands in the fields. Many slaves were employed as household servants. A few were skilled craftsmen. Some worked in industries such as iron manufacturing.<sup>6</sup>

Pennsylvania slaves were generally housed in their masters' homes and were relatively well fed and decently clothed. In many cases they were treated like members of the family. Owners often permitted their slaves to marry. Many of the blacks were instructed in the Christian religion. Quakers were encouraged to bring their slaves to meetings for worship. About 1760 the Anglican Church appointed a "catechist" to teach Philadelphia slaves the principles of Christianity. A number of observers testified to the comparative mildness of the institution of slavery in Pennsylvania. That not all of them were happy with their lot, however, is shown by the numerous advertisements for runaway slaves in colonial Philadelphia newspapers; some of these notices described marks of mistreatment.<sup>7</sup>

The slave trade and slavery itself were the subject of much legislation by the provincial assembly. In 1700 a duty of twenty shillings was levied on the importation of slaves over sixteen years of age. This tax was probably designed to raise revenue rather than to exclude slaves. In 1706

the tax was doubled. In an effort to prevent the importation of any more slaves, due to the fear of slave revolt, the assembly in 1712 passed a law raising the duty to twenty pounds, but this measure was disallowed by the English crown. Such was the fate of much colonial legislation directed against the slave trade. Jefferson included in his original draft of the Declaration of Independence a blistering attack on George III for his vetoes of colonial measures limiting "this execrable commerce." In 1715 the Pennsylvania duty was set at five pounds. This law was repealed, but in 1722 the duty was reimposed. In 1729 the duty was reduced to two pounds, where it remained for a generation. In 1761 it was raised to ten pounds, probably with a view to discouraging importation. In 1773 the tax was set at twenty pounds, a prohibitory duty.<sup>8</sup>

Beginning in 1700 the assembly passed a series of restrictive laws which might be called a "Black Code" for the colony. Legislation was enacted to aid in the return of fugitives. Blacks found footloose and idle could be bound out as servants. Liquor was not to be sold to them. Whites and blacks were subjected to different modes of trial and punishment. Blacks were denied the right to trial by jury. Slaves and black servants were forbidden to go more than ten miles from home without permission from their masters. They were required to be at home by nine o'clock at night. They were not to meet in groups of more than four persons. In 1725 inter-racial marriages were forbidden. Discriminatory measures were applied against all blacks, whether they were slaves, indentured servants, or free persons.<sup>9</sup>

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There is another side to the story of blacks in colonial Pennsylvania. The province had been settled only a few years when there began among the Quakers sporadic efforts to eliminate slavery. As early as 1688 four members of the Friends' Meeting in Germantown issued a strong written protest against slavery and the slave trade, the first such document produced in the Thirteen Colonies. This community, now part of Philadelphia, had been settled by a group of Dutch people who had been converted to the Quaker faith. These colonists came to America after residing for a time in the towns of Krefeld and Krisheim, both located in the Rhineland area of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>10</sup> "It is one of the oddities of Pennsylvania history," Dr. Philip S. Klein has remarked, "that the settlers of Germantown were Dutchmen, whereas the people called the Pennsylvania Dutch were Germans."<sup>11</sup> Francis

Daniel Pastorius, a German, commonly regarded as the founder of Germantown, did not settle there until 1685,<sup>12</sup> but he soon became its leading citizen.

Pastorius, apparently the author of the Germantown Protest against slavery, was born in 1651 in the town of Sommerhausen in the principality of Franconia. The family was of Westphalian origin and "for several generations had been prosperous, cultured, and well connected." Pastorius' father was a university graduate, a lawyer, and burgomaster of the Imperial City of Windsheim. The son attended the Windsheim Gymnasium and studied at several universities including the one of Altdorf, where he was awarded the degree of Juris Doctor in 1676. He practiced law for a time and travelled as tutor to a young nobleman. He became a Quaker convert and the agent for a group of Frankfurt Quakers who proposed to settle in Pennsylvania. He arrived in Philadelphia and settled in Germantown two years later, where he served as mayor, clerk, and a keeper of records until 1707. He served in the provincial assembly in 1687 and 1691. He was in constant demand as a scribe and notary public. He taught in the Friends' school at Philadelphia from 1698 to 1700, and was master of a school in Germantown from 1702 until shortly before his death in 1720. He was also a prolific author. His *New Primmer or Methodical Directions to Attain the True Spelling, Reading & Writing of English* (New York: William Bradford, n.d.) was "probably the first schoolbook written in Pennsylvania."<sup>13</sup>

While there is no contemporary testimony that Pastorius wrote the Germantown Protest, his biographer declares that "it is easy to detect the earmarks of his style and manner of thought in the quaint Germanisms of the document" and that "the handwriting also is his."<sup>14</sup> The other signers were "garret hendericks," "derick up de graeff," and "Abraham up Den graef" (*sic*).<sup>15</sup> It would seem that these three were of Dutch extraction.

The petition was directed to "Ye Monthly Meeting Held at Richard Worrell's." It was dated "ye 18 of the 2 month, 1688." "These are the reasons," the document began, "why we are against the traffick of men-body, as followeth." The petitioners then proceeded to give three reasons why they were against slaveholding. In the first place, it was a violation of the Golden Rule of Christianity: "There is a saying, that we shall doe to all men like as we will be done ourselves; making no differences of what generation, descent or colour they are." In this connection they called attention to the fear of Christian seamen being taken by the Turks and sold into slavery. "Now what is this better done,

as Turks doe?" In the second place, they noted that the practice of slavery and the slave trade would give the Pennsylvania colony a bad name, especially in Holland and Germany. "This makes an ill report in all those countries of Europe, where they hear off, that ye Quakers doe here handel men as they handel there ye cattle." "And for that reason some have no mind or inclination to come hither." In the third place, they forecast the possibility of slave revolt. If the blacks should combine together and "fight for their freedom,—and handel their masters and mastrisses as they did handel them before," would their owners take up swords and war against them? "... have not these negers not as much right to fight for their freedom, as you have to keep them slaves?" "Now consider well this thing," they concluded, "if it is good or bad?" In case the Monthly Meeting found it "to be good to handel these blacks" at that manner, "we desire and require you hereby lovingly, that you may inform us herein. . . ."<sup>16</sup> It may be noted that the third argument reflected the Quaker peace testimony.

The Monthly Meeting at Dublin, on "ye 30—2 mo., 1688," replied that they had considered the petition and found the matter "so weighty that we think it not expedient for us to meddle with it here, but do rather commit it to ye consideration of ye Quarterly Meeting" (at Philadelphia). This body, on April 4, also decided that the matter was "of too great a weight for this meeting to determine," and referred it to the Yearly Meeting at Burlington, New Jersey, which decided on July 5 that it was not "proper for this Meeting to give a Positive Judgment in the Case, It having so General a Relation to many other Parts, and therefore at present they forbear It."<sup>17</sup> That seemed to be the end of the matter.<sup>18</sup>

But not for long. Only five years later, in 1693, George Keith, leader of a dissident group of Quakers, induced his followers to sign *An Exhortation & Caution to Friends concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes*. This antislavery protest was the first one printed and circulated in the Colonies.<sup>19</sup> Keith was born in Scotland about 1638 and earned a master's degree at Aberdeen University in 1658. An able scholar, he had intended to enter the Presbyterian ministry, but was converted to Quakerism in 1664, and he wrote several tracts setting forth Quaker doctrine. In 1677 he and his wife travelled with George Fox, William Penn, and Robert Barclay on a fruitful missionary journey through Holland and the German states. In 1689 he settled in Philadelphia as head of what became the William Penn Charter School. Before long his ideas diverged from Quaker orthodoxy and came into conflict with those of the denomination's leaders in Pennsylvania. He formed a

separatist group calling themselves "Christian Quakers," popularly known as Keithians. He drew converts from fifty percent of the congregations belonging to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. He was disowned by the main body of Quakers and in 1700 became an Anglican. He returned to England in 1704 and died there in 1716.<sup>20</sup>

Keith's *Exhortation & Caution* was printed by William Bradford of New York but was written in Philadelphia and endorsed by the monthly meeting of "Christian Quakers" on August 13, 1693, and was "*recommended to all our Friends and Brethren, who are one with us in our Testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ, and to all others professing Christianity.*"<sup>21</sup> It opened with a preamble which declared that the Christian Gospel was to be preached to all men, that Christ had died for the salvation of all men, and that "*Negroes, Blacks and Taunies* are a real part of Mankind," for whom Christ had shed "his precious Blood."<sup>22</sup> The main body of the document advanced five reasons why Keith and his followers were "*against keeping of Negroes for Term of Life.*" The first was that it was "contrary to the Principles and Practices of the *Christian Quakers* to buy Prize or stollen Goods." Quoting Scripture, Keith wrote, "*he that stealeth a Man and selleth him . . . he shall surely be put to death, Exod. 21.6.*"<sup>23</sup> The second was that Christ had commanded his followers saying, "*All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*" (the Golden Rule).<sup>24</sup> In the third place, God had said in Deuteronomy 23:15-16, "*Thou shalt not deliver unto his Master the Servant that is escaped from his Master unto thee*" but "*he shall dwell with thee, even amongst you in that place which he shall chuse in one of thy Gates, where it liketh him best. . . .*" Fourth, the Lord had said, "*Thou shalt not oppress an hired Servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy Brethren, or of the Strangers that are in thy Land within thy Gates, lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee. . . .*"<sup>25</sup> In this respect Keith anticipated the central argument of nineteenth-century American abolitionists—that slaveholding was a sin against God. Finally, the *Exhortation* declared that riches acquired through the slave trade would be "a means to draw God's Judgments upon them" and that "*he that leads into Captivity shall go into Captivity. . . .*"<sup>26</sup> Keith's arguments were all religious in nature, and all were buttressed with Scripture texts.

Shortly after Keith's *Exhortation*, an orthodox Quaker, William Southeby by name, expounded his views on slavery in a document which has not survived. Upon hearing his and other antislavery petitions, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends took up the question of slavery in 1696. After due deliberation this body formulated an advice "that

Friends be Careful not to Encourage the bringing in of any more Negroes," to restrain their slaves from "Loose, & Lewd Living," give them religious training, and take them to Sunday meetings for worship.<sup>27</sup> In 1712 Southeby appealed in person to the provincial assembly to abolish slavery altogether. His petition was rejected.<sup>28</sup>

In 1711 members of the Chester Monthly Meeting petitioned the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to prohibit Friends from buying imported slaves. Chester was probably the first monthly meeting to demand measures to stop the spread of slavery in the Delaware River Valley.<sup>29</sup>

A generation later Ralph Sandiford (1693-1733), an immigrant from Liverpool, England, which was notorious as a center of the slave trade, came to Philadelphia and set up a shop near the city's slave auction block. In 1729 he published a substantial antislavery tract with the innocuous title *A Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times*. The next year he issued a second edition under the title *The Mystery of Iniquity*. The title page carried no publisher, but Benjamin Franklin later claimed that he printed it. It was an inflammatory tract of 111 pages, and church and civil authorities both tried to suppress it. Only a few copies survive.<sup>30</sup> Sandiford aroused so much hostility that he was ostracized by the people of Philadelphia and disowned by the Society of Friends. He withdrew to a small farm outside the city and died there two years later.<sup>31</sup>

What greater injustice could be committed, Sandiford asked, than "to rob a Man of his Liberty, which is more valuable than Life . . . ?" It was especially unjust to take a man from his native country, his parents and brethren, "and other natural Enjoyments, and that by Stealth, or by way of Purchase from them that have no right to sell them. . . ."<sup>32</sup> Those who bought slaves in America were equally guilty with those who stole them from Africa. The evil was compounded by taking the blacks from their accustomed climate, since God had made the world and all men of one blood and had appointed the "Bounds of their Habitations, *Acts 17:26*." It was especially outrageous, he thought, to separate husbands from wives and children from both and to sell them "to the vilest of Men, and their Offspring after them," to all Eternity. . . .<sup>33</sup> To keep slaves and pass them on to one's heirs was to "entail Sin on our Posterity, *ad Infinitum*. . . ." If Friends had steered clear of this practice, they would have been "a shining Light to these poor Heathen, and a Precedent to the Nations. . . ."<sup>34</sup>

Less than ten years later, in 1737, Benjamin Lay, one of the most picturesque abolitionists in American history, published a book entitled *All Slave Keepers, That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates*. . . .

Born in Colchester, England, in 1677, Lay was of Quaker parentage. Having little education, he worked as an apprentice glove-maker, a farmer, and then as a seaman. In the latter capacity he travelled widely. In 1710 he married and settled down in Colchester, but in 1717, as a result of his part in some public controversies, he was "disunited" from the Society of Friends. In 1718, at the age of forty-one, he settled on the Caribbean Island of Barbados and went into business. There he saw the horrors of the slave trade and slavery, became an abolitionist, and befriended the blacks. A great clamor was soon raised against him. After thirteen years in Barbados, he moved to Philadelphia in 1731, soon thereafter settling in the country six miles north of the city.<sup>35</sup>

Lay was an eccentric. Only four feet seven inches in height, he was hunch-backed, and his head was large in proportion to his body. He had a barrel chest, skinny legs, and a long white beard. His body often appeared contorted. He drank nothing but water and milk, ate only vegetables, consumed only "free produce" (i.e., products produced by free as opposed to slave labor), and made his own clothes. He once attempted, like Jesus, to fast for forty days; he did so for three weeks, when friends intervened to save his life.<sup>36</sup>

Lay gave his later years wholly to the antislavery cause. At the Yearly Meeting in Burlington, New Jersey, he came with a bladder of red berry juice concealed within a book-binding, and wearing a military coat under which he carried a sword. When the opportunity arose for him to speak in the meeting, he delivered an antislavery tirade. Reaching a climax, he asserted that "it would be justifiable in the sight of the Almighty, who beholds and respects all nations and colours of men with an equal regard, if you should thrust a sword through (the slaves') hearts as I do through this 'book'." He then drew his sword and pierced the bladder, sprinkling the red juice ("blood") over those who sat near him.<sup>37</sup>

On another occasion Lay stood outside the entrance to a Quaker meetinghouse with one foot and leg bare, deep in snow. Those in attendance admonished him that he was risking damage to his health. "Ah," said Lay, "*you pretend compassion for me, but you do not feel for the poor slaves in your fields, who go all winter half clad.*"<sup>38</sup> Yet again, he kidnapped the six-year old son of a slaveholder. "*Your child is safe in my house,*" he told the father, "*and you may now conceive of the sorrow you inflict upon the parents of the negroe girl you hold in slavery, for she was torn from them by avarice.*"<sup>39</sup>

In his antislavery tract, printed like Sandiford's by Franklin, Lay branded slave-keeping as "a notorious Sin" and "a Practice so gross and



hurtful to Religion, and destructive to Government, beyond what words can set forth. . . ."<sup>40</sup> Upon looking over the manuscript when Lay first brought it to him, Franklin noticed that it was not paged and that there appeared to be no order or arrangement to it. "It is no matter," Lay said, "print any part thou pleasest first."<sup>41</sup> At the end of his book Lay apologized for its stylistic deficiencies: "remember that it was written by one that was a poor common sailor, and an illiterate man."<sup>42</sup> He spent his last twenty years living in a cave at Abington, Pennsylvania, where he died in 1759 at the ripe old age of eighty-two. He had campaigned against slavery for forty-one years, twenty-eight of them in Pennsylvania. He had the satisfaction of seeing the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, one year before his death, take action to disown members who bought or sold slaves and encouraging those who held slaves to set them free. "Thanksgiving and praise be rendered unto the Lord God," he exclaimed. "I can now die in peace."<sup>43</sup>

By the time of Lay's death two more conventional and more distinguished men had emerged as leaders of the antislavery movement in Pennsylvania—John Woolman and Anthony Benezet.

Woolman remains one of the most admired of American Quakers. Thomas E. Drake, author of *Quakers and Slavery in America*, called him "the greatest Quaker of the eighteenth century and perhaps the most Christlike individual that Quakerism has ever produced," and stated that he became "the channel through which the antislavery impulse flowed into the conscience of the Society of Friends in America." He had "the peculiar gift of the mystic—a vision of God's truth, and a capacity to kindle that vision in others." He worked "not by argument alone, such as the Germantown Quakers had used, nor by the angry denunciations" employed by Sandiford and Lay, but "by quiet, kindly persuasion." He chose "the truly Quaker way of love."<sup>44</sup> His *Journal* and his antislavery tracts have an honored place in American literature.

Woolman was not a Pennsylvanian, but he worked closely with the Philadelphia Quakers and made probably the greatest contribution to the movement which culminated in the decision made by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to ban slaveholding in 1776. Born in 1720 near Mount Holly, New Jersey, where he made his home most of his life, he was one of thirteen children of Samuel and Elizabeth (Barr) Woolman. His forebears were "men of substance." His grandfather, who had emigrated to Burlington in 1678, was a proprietor of the province of West Jersey. His father was a candidate for the provincial assembly in 1739. John's formal education was limited to what was offered by a

neighborhood school, but he “improved his mind by wide reading.”<sup>45</sup> He left his father’s farm at the age of twenty to tend a shop in Mount Holly, where he learned the tailor’s trade. He also worked as a surveyor and as a scribe, executing documents conveying property and drawing up wills. From time to time he taught school, and he published a primer that ran through several editions. In later years he owned a farm of several hundred acres, including “a fine orchard.”<sup>46</sup> He married in 1749 and had one daughter.

It was Woolman’s work as a scribe which first prepared the way for his antislavery career. He had seen slaves in the families of wealthier Friends in Mount Holly, in Burlington, and in Philadelphia. His maternal grandfather, Henry Barr, had owned a slave woman, and the shopkeeper by whom he was employed had a female slave in his household. Since the lot of such domestic servants was comparatively easy, Woolman had thought little about the matter until one day his employer decided to sell his slaves and ordered young Woolman to write the bill of sale. Though distressed about the action, he gave way and wrote the required papers, but he informed the seller and the buyer, who was a Quaker, “that I believed slavekeeping to be a practice inconsistent with the Christian religion.”<sup>47</sup> The next time he was asked to write such a document, he refused.<sup>48</sup>

Licensed as a Quaker minister, in 1746 he made a three-months journey among Friends’ meetings in Virginia, where he saw plantation slavery at first-hand. “. . . I saw in these southern provinces so many vices and corruptions increased by this trade and this way of life,” he wrote, “that it appeared to me as a dark gloominess hanging over the land; and though now many willingly run into it, yet in (the) future the consequence will be grievous to posterity.”<sup>49</sup> This proved to be a gross understatement. “Close your ears to John Woolman one century,” a distinguished English historian remarked, “and you will get John Brown the next, with Grant to follow.”<sup>50</sup>

In 1753 Woolman decided to put his antislavery ideas into print. With the assistance of Anthony Benezet and the approval of the Overseers of the Press of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, which bore the expense of printing it, Woolman’s *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes: Recommended to the Professors of Christianity of Every Denomination* was published in 1754. In this brief and temperate essay, Woolman appealed to Scripture to buttress his argument. He applied the famous passage from the 25th chapter of Matthew to slaveholders: “Forasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me” (verse 40).<sup>51</sup> Like the four men who had signed the

Germantown Protest of 1688, he also appealed to the Golden Rule: “whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matthew 7:12).<sup>52</sup> The Overseers of the Press distributed copies of this tract to Quakers throughout the Thirteen Colonies and in England. “No other antislavery document,” Professor Drake remarked, “had hitherto received such extensive circulation in any language anywhere.”<sup>53</sup> It prepared the way for later pamphlets by Anthony Benezet and Dr. Benjamin Rush in the Colonies and by John Wesley, Granville Sharp, and Thomas Clarkson in England. It influenced official antislavery pronouncements by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting which soon followed.<sup>54</sup> Part Two of Woolman’s *Considerations* was published in 1762. He died of smallpox contracted while on a mission to England in 1772. He was only fifty-one years old.<sup>55</sup>

Woolman’s contemporary and co-worker Anthony Benezet represented a new emphasis in the rising antislavery movement. While not abandoning the religious basis for antislavery sentiment, he supplemented it with application of the natural rights philosophy associated with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Benezet was born in France in 1713, the son of Huguenot parents. Religious persecution drove the family to the Netherlands and then to London, where they lived for sixteen years. There young Anthony received a good education, served a mercantile apprenticeship, and became a Quaker convert at the age of fourteen. In 1731, at the age of eighteen, he moved with his family to Philadelphia, where he worked in his brothers’ importing business. In 1736 he married Joyce Marriott of Burlington, N.J., with whom he lived happily for forty-eight years. Dislike for the life of a merchant led him to give it up for the profession of teaching.<sup>56</sup>

Beginning at the Germantown Academy, he soon moved to the Friends’ English Public School, which became the William Penn Charter School, where he taught for twelve years. In 1755 he established a pioneering school for girls. Even before that, in 1750, he had quietly begun in his home an evening school for blacks, out of which developed the Africans’ School established by Quakers in 1770. This experience convinced him that blacks had a mental capacity equal to that of whites, a revolutionary idea for the time.<sup>57</sup>

Benezet wrote several influential antislavery tracts. The first of these, *Observations on the Enslaving, Importing, and Purchasing of Negroes*, appeared in 1759. Next came *A Short Account of that Part of Africa Inhabited by the Negroes* (1762), which was translated into German. In 1766 came *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and her Colonies*, which according to his biographer “created not a little stir on this

continent and in Europe.”<sup>58</sup> In this work Benezet charged that slavery was “destructive of the welfare of human society, and of the peace and prosperity of every country, in proportion as it prevails.” Furthermore, it destroyed “the bonds of natural affection and interest, whereby mankind in general are united.” It also encouraged idleness, destroyed marriage, corrupted youth, and debauched morals. It excited “continual apprehensions of dangers, and frequent alarms.” Finally, it was “inconsistent with the plainest Precepts of the Gospel, the dictates of reason, and every common sentiment of humanity.”<sup>59</sup>

In 1771 Benezet published *Some Historical Account of Guinea*, his most substantial work (144 pages). In this book Benezet utilized the writings of men who had actually been engaged in the slave trade to describe conditions in the African kingdoms from which the slaves were taken. He maintained that the Africans had generally lived in peace and prosperity before European slave traders appeared on the scene.<sup>60</sup> He also declared that blacks and whites alike had a “natural right” to liberty.<sup>61</sup> Benezet’s writings influenced such prominent English reformers as John Wesley, Granville Sharp, and Thomas Clarkson, and Americans such as Franklin and Benjamin Rush.<sup>62</sup>

Benezet is said to have visited every member of the Pennsylvania Assembly in an effort to persuade them to pass the Abolition Act of 1780.<sup>63</sup> He lived until 1784. His will provided that what was left of his estate after his wife’s death as well as his large personal library should go to the Africans’ school.<sup>64</sup>

At Benezet’s suggestion, Dr. Benjamin Rush, a rising young Philadelphia physician who was later to become president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, wrote *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America, upon Slave-Keeping*, published in 1773. Born on a plantation in the community of Byberry in 1745 (o.s.), Rush received the A.B. degree from Princeton in 1760 and studied medicine at the College of Philadelphia, the University of Edinburgh, and St. Thomas’s Hospital in London. Returning to Philadelphia in 1769, he began the practice of medicine and served as professor of chemistry (later of medicine) at the College of Philadelphia, which was to become the University of Pennsylvania. Unlike other pioneer abolitionists discussed thus far, Rush was not a Quaker but at various times an Anglican, a Presbyterian, and a Universalist.<sup>65</sup>

In his *Address* on slavery Dr. Rush argued that Negroes were not by nature intellectually or morally inferior to whites: “All the vices which are charged upon the Negroes in the southern colonies and the

West-Indies, such as Idleness, Treachery, Theft, and the like, are the genuine offspring of slavery, and serve as an argument to prove that they were not intended by Providence for it.”<sup>66</sup>

In 1775 Thomas Paine, America’s most famous pamphleteer, entered the ranks of antislavery propagandists. He was born in Thetford, England, in 1737, the son of a poor Quaker corsetmaker. After briefly attending grammar school, he was apprenticed to a corsetmaker at the age of thirteen. At nineteen he enlisted on a privateer in the Seven Years’ War. Subsequently he worked as a tax collector, a teacher, a tobacconist, and a grocer. He also went through two brief childless marriages. In 1774 he obtained a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin, Pennsylvania’s agent in England, and made his way to Philadelphia, where he began writing for newspapers and magazines.<sup>67</sup> On March 8, 1775, an article from his pen entitled “African Slavery in America” was published in the *Pennsylvania Journal*.

The essay was cast in the form of a letter addressed “To Americans.” “That some desperate wretches should be willing to steal and enslave men by violence and murder for gain,” Paine wrote, “is rather lamentable than strange. But that many civilized, nay, Christianized people should approve, and be concerned in the savage practice is surprising; and still persist, though it has been so often proved contrary to the light of nature, to every principle of justice and humanity, and even good policy, by a succession of eminent men, and several late publications.”<sup>68</sup>

Like Benezet, Paine cited the testimony of slave traders themselves that many of the Africans inhabited fertile countries, worked as industrious farmers, enjoyed plenty, and lived quietly, “averse to war,” until Europeans debauched them with alcohol, bribed them to fight one another, and captured them for sale in America. He estimated that the English were taking one hundred thousand Africans each year, of whom thirty thousand died en route or during the first year of enslavement. Thousands more were slain in the internecine wars fomented by Europeans. “So much innocent blood have the managers of this inhuman trade to answer for to the common Lord of all.”<sup>69</sup> The slaves, he asserted, had “a natural, perfect right” to freedom.<sup>70</sup> As abolitionists were to do for the next century, he condemned the separation of families which accompanied the slave trade. He also called attention to the contradiction between American complaints of being enslaved by the British and their own enslavement of the blacks.<sup>71</sup> “These are the sentiments,” he concluded, “of JUSTICE AND HUMANITY.”<sup>72</sup>

Serving later as clerk of the Pennsylvania Assembly, Paine is credited with having written the high-minded preamble of the state's path-breaking Abolition Act of 1780.<sup>73</sup>

Throughout the colonial period a considerable number of slaves had won their freedom, not only through voluntary manumission by their owners but also through paid labor or through flight. Some had their status changed from slavery to indentured servitude. Often a slave was set free on the condition that at some future date he would pay to his master the purchase price. Frequently a master freed his slaves by his will, thus preparing to meet his death with a clear conscience. By the time of the American Revolution there were several thousand free blacks in the state.<sup>74</sup>

These persons were sometimes kidnapped and sold back into slavery. In order to prevent such misfortunes, ten Philadelphia gentlemen, "of various religious denominations," got together at the Sun Tavern (Second Street) on April 14, 1775, and formed the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Kept in Bondage.<sup>75</sup> This organization became the first antislavery society in the United States, if not in the world. In 1787 its name was changed to read: "The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery; the Relief of Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage; and for Improving the condition of the African Race."<sup>76</sup> It is generally known simply as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and is still in existence today, meeting annually to decide on constructive and relevant uses of the income from its substantial endowment.

At its initial meeting in 1775, the Society elected a president (John Baldwin), a secretary (Thomas Harrison), and a treasurer (Samuel Davis). The members also chose a Standing Committee "to take charge of the several reports of slavery as they come to their knowledge" and "to use the utmost of their endeavours to obtain justice to those people according to their several solicitations and make a report of the same to our next meeting."<sup>77</sup> Although the minutes of the first meeting listed five instances of persons being illegally held in slavery, the Society's main concern seems to have been the case of Dinah Nevill (or Neville) and her children, who had been brought from New Jersey to Philadelphia for sale to Virginia or the Carolinas. Strangely enough, the woman in question was not of African but of American Indian descent. The mayor had intervened and sent the family to the city workhouse. The Standing Committee employed an attorney to represent them in court.<sup>78</sup> The outcome of the case is unknown. The Society held three additional meetings in 1775—on May 29, August 23, and November 11. At the

August meeting a constitution was adopted and signed. A total of twenty-four men attended one or more of these meetings. The November minutes carried a notation that the next meeting would be held on February 26, 1776. The meeting was not held. Indeed, more than eight years passed before the next meeting. The minutes for February 10, 1784, included the following apology: "The National commotions that have prevailed for these last several years are the only reason why the company have not met together according to the rules established for its government."<sup>79</sup>

In the memorable year of 1776 the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends became the first major religious body to require its members to cease and desist from slaveholding. The decision had been many years in the making. As far back as 1696 the group had advised its members against the importation of slaves. In 1754 it had sent an epistle to its members declaring that slaveholding was a sin. In 1758 it had provided that those who bought or sold slaves were to be visited by church leaders and advised that they were in violation of such discipline. Between 1757 and 1776 there were one hundred and eleven instances of disciplinary proceedings against members buying or selling slaves. In 1774 the Yearly Meeting declared that any transfer of a slave—by gift or purchase—was an offense for which the guilty party could be disowned. Finally, in the fall of 1776 it had provided that any Quakers holding slaves were to be disowned.<sup>80</sup>

What explanation can be offered for Quaker primacy in the early antislavery movement? Dr. J. William Frost, Director of the Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, has suggested several reasons. In the first place was the Quaker belief that there is "that of God in every man," including blacks, and that all men should be treated equally. Secondly, Quaker pacifism was offended by the harsh practices used in procuring slaves from Africa and by the danger of slave revolts in America. In the third place, Quakers refused to accept Biblical sanctions commonly advanced in support of slavery such as the curse of Cain and the judgment against Ham, insisting instead that all nations were of one blood. They also placed special emphasis on the Golden Rule.<sup>81</sup> In addition, "the traditional Quaker concern with children and the importance of the family," he notes, provided another weapon against slavery. One of the main bases of opposition to slavery was its incompatibility with stable family life.<sup>82</sup>

Dr. Frost has also noted that Quakers were influenced by the great evangelical revival which swept the colonies in the mid-eighteenth century and gave an impetus to consideration for the unfortunate.

Finally, Quakers were strongly affected by the eighteenth-century developments associated with the Enlightenment, such as the natural rights philosophy embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the accompanying spirit of benevolence.<sup>83</sup>

## NOTES

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2. Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, *American Population before the Federal Census of 1790* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 114-115.
3. Merle Gerald Brouwer, "The Negro as a Slave and as a Free Black in Colonial Pennsylvania" (Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, 1973), p. 17.
4. Gary B. Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 30 (April 1973): 236-237.
5. Edward Raymond Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery—Servitude—Freedom, 1639-1861* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1911; reprint ed. New York: Arno Press and the *New York Times*, 1969), pp. 11-14.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15, 40-41; Brouwer, "The Negro in Colonial Pennsylvania," pp. 51-68.
7. Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, pp. 38-53; Brouwer, "The Negro in Colonial Pennsylvania," suggests (pp. 112-148) that slavery in this colony was not as mild as Turner thought.
8. Darold Duane Wax, "The Negro Slave Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1962), pp. 239-294.
9. Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, pp. 23-37; Brouwer, "The Negro in Colonial Pennsylvania," pp. 167-185.
10. William I. Hull, *William Penn and the Dutch Quaker Migration to Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Patterson and White Co., 1935), pp. 178-180.
11. Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom, *A History of Pennsylvania*, second ed. (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), p. 42.
12. Hull, *Dutch Quaker Migration*, p. 181.
13. *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Pastorius, Francis Daniel," by George Harvey Genzmer.
14. Marion Dexter Learned, *The Life of Francis Daniel Pastorius, the Founder of Germantown* (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1980), p. 260.
15. Printed copy of "Germantown Friends' Protest against Slavery, 1688," supplied by the Department of Records, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. This archive also contains the original manuscript copy, now greatly faded and in parts illegible. The text of the Germantown Protest and numerous other early antislavery documents may be found in a comprehensive collection edited by Roger Bruns under the title *Am I Not a Man and a Brother: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America, 1688-1788* (New York and London: Chelsea House Publishers in association with R.R. Bowker Co., 1977), pp. 3-5.
16. Printed copy, Friends Department of Records.



17. Ibid.

18. Some authorities state that the Germantown Protest was buried in Quaker archives and was not rediscovered until 1844. This appears to be incorrect. Thomas Clarkson, the well-known English abolitionist, wrote of it in his *History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*, 2 vols. (London: R. Taylor and Co., 1808), 1: 136.

19. George H. Moore, ed., "The First Printed Protest against Slavery in America," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 13 (1889): 265-270.

20. *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Keith, George," by Rufus M. Jones.

21. Moore, "First Printed Protest," p. 270.

22. Ibid., p. 266.

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24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., pp. 268-269.

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29. Jean Ruth Soderlund, "Conscience, Interest, and Power: The Development of Quaker Opposition to Slavery in the Delaware Valley, 1688-1780" (Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1982), p. 53.

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31. Roberts Vaux, *Memoirs of the Lives of Benjamin Lay and Ralph Sandiford: Two of the Earliest Public Advocates for the Emancipation of the Enslaved Africans* (Philadelphia: Solomon W. Conrad, 1815), pp. 59-73.

32. Ralph Sandiford, *The Mystery of Iniquity; in a Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times. . .*, 2nd ed. (printed for the Author, 1730), pp. 20-21.

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34. Ibid., pp. 22-23.

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37. Ibid., p. 306.

38. Vaux, *Memoirs of Lay and Sandiford*, pp. 25-28.

39. Ibid., pp. 28-29.

40. Benjamin Lay, *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates. . .* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, 1737), title page.

41. Rush, "Biographical Anecdotes," p. 299.

42. Vaux, *Memoirs of Lay and Sandiford*, p. 31.

43. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, p. 46.

44. Ibid., p. 51

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48. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
50. George Macaulay Trevelyan, *Clio, A Muse and Other Essays* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), p. 47.
51. Moulton, ed., *Journal of Woolman*, p. 200.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
53. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, p. 56.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Whitney, *John Woolman*, pp. 426-430.
56. *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Benezet, Anthony," by Amerlia Mott Gummere. The standard biography is George S. Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1937), which contains a large selection from his correspondence. See also the excellent dissertation by Nancy Slocum Hornick, "Anthony Benezet: Eighteenth-Century Social Critic, Educator, and Abolitionist" (Ph.D., University of Maryland, 1974).
57. Nancy Slocum Hornick, "Anthony Benezet and the Africans' School: Toward a Theory of Full Equality," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 99 (October 1975): 399-421.
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59. *Ibid.*
60. Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (Philadelphia: Printed by Joseph Cruikshank, 1771), pp. 59-60.
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69. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

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74. Turner, *Negro in Pennsylvania*, pp. 54-63.
75. Wayne J. Eberly, "The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, 1775-1830" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, 1973), pp. 22-23. See also the brief account (46 pages) by Margaret H. Bacon, *History of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery; the Relief of Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage: and for Improving the Condition of the African Race* (Philadelphia: Published by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, 1959).
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