

Early Quaker Practice and the Advocacy for Polyvocality Then, Now, and Beyond

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Abstract

Controversies generated by the subjugation of man by man do not come without questioning or challenges to such a drive that would transform one faction of the human race into beasts of burden as a result of the hue of the skin. Both the questioning of and challenges to that heinous system aim at reestablishing an ideal egalitarianism among men. This paper strives to shed light on how Quaker advocacy for polyvocality at the inception of slavery, during and after the "abolition" of the same, has come to be one of the places of memory

from which HBCUs could tap and enrich their wealth of peaceful, nonviolent resistance to make Black voices resonate in the 21st century and beyond with committed writing and activism that speak truth to power.

Introduction

In an age ironically known as that of information and fraught with misinformation and disinformation, and also replete with twisted facts, alternate facts, fake news, lies, and outright noisy confusion generated by rhetoric that challenge ethics and morals, it is worthwhile diving back into history to right some narratives and voices that the contemporary trend tends to thwart and or outrightly obliterate. This paper strives to shed light on how Quaker advocacy for polyvocality at the inception of slavery, during and after the “abolition” of the same, has come to be one of the places of memory from which HBCUs could tap and enrich their wealth of peaceful, nonviolent resistance to make Black voices resonate in the 21st century and beyond with committed writing and activism that speak truth to power. The title, “Early Quaker Practice and the Advocacy for Polyvocality Then, Now, and Beyond,” is an invitation to start by pointing out that pairing Quakerism and Polyvocality, at first glance, might sound antinomic, yet such pairing constitutes a quick reminder of James C. Scott’s opus magna *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcript*. This text exposes the binary of oppositional forces. Therein, Scott (1991) opines that,

The acting that comes of civility will be of less interest to us in what follows than the acting that has been imposed throughout history on the vast majority of people. I mean the public performance required of those subjects to elaborate and systematic forms of social subordination: the worker to the boss, the tenant or sharecropper to the

landlord, the serf to the lord, the slave to the master, the untouchable to the Brahmin, a member of a subject race to one of the dominant race (p. 2).

In this age of globalization, Bill F. Ndi, Adaku T. Ankuma, and Benjamin Hart Fishkin (2017) explore how repressed voices find pathways and outlets to air out their muzzling, challenging readers to mind how forms of mis(representation) and presentation crisscross; a crisscrossing, they posit in *The Repressed Expressed: Novel Perspectives on African and Black Diasporic Literature*, brings into contact forces of repression and those of the will to express all that which is repressed. It is in this vein that this paper delves into one of such movements questioning authorities and status quo by bringing their advocacy for polyvocality to bear on a trend that has reduced and continues to reduce African people and those of African descent into voiceless beasts of burden. This assertion poses a challenge as to how Quaker advocacy for polyvocality at the inception of slavery, during and after the “abolition” of the same, would be one of the places of memory from which HBCUs could tap and enrich their wealth of peaceful, nonviolent resistance and coexistence to make Black voices resonate in the 21st century with writing and activism that speak truth to power in a post-colonial world. Isn't it true that radical politics has done little in the way of altering how Black people are seen by white people who stubbornly appropriate Black labor and remain unperturbed? Does bell hooks (2014) not remind us that this is what “blurs our ability to clearly know and define the oppressor” (p. 156)?

Quaker *publishing of the Truth* is a practice that is rooted in resistance to silencing; and it is done through the practice of silence during Quaker Meetings. Much could be conveyed by silence. The preceding assertions leave one with more questions than with answers and clarity as to how silence could yield multiple meanings.

How does silence translate into polyvocality, the quality of having multiple voices or meanings and or suggestions that a text, statement, or concept is open to interpretation by various voices or perspectives? How did Quakers advocate polyvocality? What resonance does Quaker polyvocality have in the age of unrelenting attacks on Critical Race Theory (CRT)? What is the connection between CRT and Quaker advocacy? It should be noted that, as Ndi, Ankumah, and Fishkin (2017) point out in *The Repressed Expressed: Novel Perspectives on African and Black Diasporic Literature*, that

The world is increasingly becoming a global village in which cultures, peoples, ideas, traditions, lifestyles, religions, beliefs and philosophical systems, thoughts, and forms of (mis)representation and presentation crisscross. This crisscrossing of these values brings into contact forces of repression and the will to express all that which is repressed. This is because their coming into contact does not translate into an all accepting world of expression without restraint. (p. XIII)

The Quaker text, Nigel Smith (1998) underscores, in discussing the *Journal of George Fox*, a classic journal after which John Woolman's is modeled, "conveys a greater sense of inseparability of the symbolic and the contingent" (p. xix).

A quick look at the foundational precepts of Quakerism, amongst other things, would demonstrate through the works of John Woolman how both Quaker belief and advocacy for everything Quakers stand for are tantamount to the same for polyvocality. Quakerism emphasizes direct knowledge of God through experience, total disparagement of any building (known as church, which they called steeple houses) being the House of God, the priesthood of all believers, the pursuit of peace and nonviolence, community decision making and peaceful coexistence, the inner

light, disregard for formal creed or dogma, practical application of concepts of primitive Christianity, historical evolution, silent worship, and ministry.

In short, Quaker texts are open to multiple readings because of the movement's emphasis on individual spiritual experience. It is for this reason that any who professed to be a Quaker ended up jailed. They were accused of blasphemy as they claimed they knew Christ by experience from the Christ in them. This simple claim was read as though Quakers claimed that they were Christ himself. Besides, they lacked a rigid creed yet embraced a diversity of theological perspectives within the movement. The dynamic nature of Quaker practices steeped into organic and spontaneous assemblies of silence, and the historical and contemporary evolution of Quaker thought made of Quakers disparate radical voices that ought to be silent at all costs. There was an openness to multiple interpretations that reflected an uncanny commitment to ongoing revelation and the recognition that individuals may be led by the Inner Light *cum* inner voice in different ways. Even though Quakers advocated plainness of language and simplicity of style, they were effective language users who skillfully blended the literal, the figurative, and the symbolic in the use of every word of which they made use. Henry A. Virkler (1980), in the introduction to his *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, draws attention as to how the literalness with which words are interpreted is controversial when it comes to interpreting biblical scriptures. He quotes Bernard Ramm saying, "conservative Christians are sometimes accused of being 'wooden-headed literalists' in their interpretation." (pp. 126, 146). How, then, does this compare to Quaker writings? Quakers took this to the point of making sure that, "The bible could mean different things to different people at different times, in different circumstances. [...]"

there are few ideas in whose support a biblical text cannot be found" (Hill, 1994, p. 5).

In the case of John Woolman, the 18th century abolitionist, his work is a classic Quaker text that embodies many of the abovementioned core principles of Quakerism and their dogged pursuit of practical and primitive Christianity. The text is packed with a richness that allows for a multitude of interpretations and insights. The principles of Quakerism and the concept of multiple readings and interpretations are highly relevant to understanding and appreciating Woolman's journal. This is because, as W. Phillips Shively (1980) makes clear in *Power & Choice*, the complexity and elusiveness of power is based on some form of power with varied sources (Shively). Also, it must be mentioned that Quaker writings like John Woolman's "bear comparison with the 'unshaped' writings of the postmodern generation" as they constitute "the 'degree zero' of puritan expression" (Smith, 1998, p. xix). In addition, even though Woolman is of the 18th century, his writings followed the tenets of early Quaker writings. Christopher Hill (1994) reminds us that, "Many seventeenth-century Englishmen thought they were in such direct communication with God whom the authorities in the church and state would have totally rejected" (p. 59). Thus, Quaker writing as marginal writing becomes a site for producing a counter discourse to the hegemonic.

John Woolman's journal is deeply rooted in his personal spiritual journey and his efforts to live in accordance with the Inner Light and inner voice. He records his inner struggles and spiritual experiences, as well as the guidance he receives from God. We must be reminded that Quakerism places a strong emphasis on the "Inner Light *cum* inner voice," the belief that individuals have a direct connection to God and can receive spiritual guidance through their own experiences. This emphasis on personal revelation means that

different Quakers may have unique insights and interpretations of their faith without reliance on any dictates from a regimented hierarchy or organized structure. Also, the narrative for differing experiences of God is nothing short of advocacy for polyvocality as the individual experiences when narrated become the irritant, like CRT, which is frowned upon. Nigel Smith (1998) highlights that most Quaker Journals were written “by young people, whose memories of their experiences were still fresh” (p. xx). He takes this a step further, pointing out through an allusion to Julia Kristeva that “... the Quakers were at the cutting edge of a [...] of revolution in puritan language, where they were at once modern and [...] postmodern” (p. xx).

Even if CRT as a legal and social theory emerged more than two hundred years after John Woolman, it is evident from reading his anti-slavery arguments and advocacy for social justice, as well as his keen understanding of the systemic nature of oppression inflicted on enslaved Africans, that he stands tall as a precursor to this theory. Isn't it true that his writings, which predate the formal development of CRT, contain anticipatory elements viz. his recognition of systemic injustice, which foregrounds CRT? Like CRT, John Woolman refrained from condemning individual acts of cruelty, which he imputed on the institution of slavery which he highlighted to be fundamentally wrong. Woolman's incessant critique of the institution of slavery shifts his narrative into the realm of what Jean Paul Sartre identifies as committed writing. And he does not only end there because his writing takes the twist of visionary writing in that it projects the becoming of the institution of slavery against which his critique is veered.

Again, CRT as we know it focuses on intersectionality, explicating oppression as suffered based upon factors such as race and socio-economic status. John Woolman in his journal focuses on slavery

and argues against the mistreatment of enslaved Africans, acknowledging their racial/African origin as the underlying cause of their enslavement. Woolman uses such an argument to challenge the status quo by advocating for the abolition of slavery as the only means of stopping the perpetuation of disparities lived in the colonies. Like Woolman, CRT lays a strong emphasis on the importance of action taking, as did Woolman by engaging slaveholders while advocating for change. John Woolman did not just write about the moral problems of slavery; he also called for the dismantling of the institution. He writes and talks about the divine goodness that made way for his return after a meeting at the house of friends who had slaves, and how he was inwardly supported to declare the truth in some degree to the people:

My mind hath been bowed under a sense of divine goodness manifested among us; my heart hath been often enlarged in true love, both among ministers and elders and in public meetings, and through the Lord's goodness I believe it hath been a fresh visitation to many, in particular to the youth. (p. 286)

All in all, Woolman's arguments and activism were all deeply rooted in his moral and ethical conviction, just like the consideration of racial injustice that CRT injects in its critique. While Woolman's arguments laid the groundwork for later abolitionist movements and social justice activism, including aspects of CRT, it's crucial to recognize the historical and contextual differences between his time and the contemporary debates surrounding CRT. Nonetheless, his writings remain a significant precursor to the broader struggles for social justice and equality that continue today.

John Woolman draws attention to slavery as a site of privation and oppression as much as that of resistance: present and future. He

kicks against what enslavers uphold and call African slothiness, i.e. enslaved Africans' resistance to working, not for their own benefit but for someone else's as upheld by enslavers. He underscores that the slaves' unwillingness to work for the benefit of others and not of themselves is much more of a hint that the continued pursuance of such horrendous an institution is laying the foundation for opposition to the exploitation of man by man, and will thus continue in the future. As bell hooks (2014) will have it in the 20th century, "[enslaved Africans] come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle" (p. 153). Woolman debunks any claims by proponents of the institution of slavery that enslaved Africans were, in fact, being rendered a service as their lives in Africa left them worse off than in their present condition. By doing so, Woolman flips the narratives told by enslavers—who believe that enslaving Africans is a salvatory mission—and thus, provides a critical response to domination with which bell hooks agrees. bell hooks, talking about sites of resistance, says "this site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our [enslaved Africans'] critical response to domination" (p. 153). Furthermore, Ibram X. Kendi (2019), a known historian and critical race theorist, expounds on the origins of racist ideas in America and highlights how and why Blacks were reduced to being enslaved in the United States. He alludes to the fact that "Curse theorists were the first known segregationists. They believed that black people were naturally and permanently inferior, and totally incapable of becoming White" (p. 32).

In addition to his personal convictions, Woolman's journal documents his activism and advocacy against slavery. He traveled extensively to many slave holding plantations where he engaged in all types of conversations with slaveholders in an attempt to persuade them to free their slaves. His journal captures the challenges and successes of these efforts. He reminds the readers

of his fervor to see the oppressors come closer to what he understood as the pure principle of divine love. He writes,

I felt my mind engaged in a fervent desire that the inhabitants of these parts might come closer into the pure principle of divine love, and cease from all claim of right to oppress their fellow-creatures; and in this labor I found inward peace. (p. 195)

Even when he tries to relent his efforts in doing what is right, he tells the reader that,

I was brought seriously to consider my ways; and the sight of my backslidings affected me with sorrow, yet for want of rightly attending to the reproofs of instruction, vanity was added to vanity, and repentance to repentance. Upon the whole, my mind became more and more alienated from the truth, and I hastened toward destruction. (pp. 158-159)

In interpreting Woolman's thoughts on slavery, readers can find a range of perspectives. Some may see his writings as a powerful example of moral conviction and social justice activism, while others may view them as an illustration of the inner struggle to align personal ethical values with societal unethical norms. Regardless of interpretation, his journal remains a significant historical document that sheds light on the Quaker anti-slavery movement and the broader struggle for human rights in which John Woolman devoted his whole life. John Woolman's journal, to say the least, is replete with his deep abhorrence of slavery. He describes his personal struggle with the moral and spiritual implications of slavery, especially as he encounters it during his travels. He writes about his anguish at witnessing the suffering of enslaved individuals, and he criticizes the cruelty and inhumanity of the institution. In one instance, he writes,

Near the Time the last-mentioned Friend first spoke to me, a Neighbour received a bad Bruise in his Body, and sent for me to bleed him; which being done, he desired me to write his Will: I took Notes; and, amongst other Things, he told me to which of his Children he gave his young Negro: I considered the Pain and Distress he was in, and knew not how it would end; so I wrote his Will, save only that Part concerning his Slave, and carrying it to his Bed side, read it to him; and then told him, in a friendly Way, that I could not write any Instruments by which my Fellow-creatures were made Slaves, without bringing Trouble on my own Mind: I let him know that I charged nothing for what I had done; and desired to be excused from doing the other Part in the Way he proposed: We then had a serious Conference on the Subject; at length he agreeing to set her free, I finished his Will. (pp. 180-181)

The non-creedal nature of Quakerism tempts one to posit that John Woolman refused to allow any formal creed or dogma to dictate his personal beliefs. While there are core principles and testimonies (e.g., peace, equality) to which many Quakers adhere, there is a wide range of theological diversity within the Quaker community. This diversity allows for varying theological perspectives and interpretations of Quaker teachings and writings. Thus, Woolman explicates and, without mincing words, makes known how important it is for everyone to hold firm to that which they hold to be true as a personal moral value. He argues that it must be so since untenable deep-rooted customs are difficult to change. He writes that

Deep-rooted Customs, though wrong, are not easily altered; but it is the Duty of every one to be firm in that which they certainly know is right for them. A charitable benevolent Man, well acquainted with a Negro, may, I believe, under some Circumstances, keep him in his Family as a Servant, from no other Motives than the Negro's Good;

but Man, as Man, knows not what shall be after him, nor hath Assurance that his Children will attain to that Perfection in Wisdom and Goodness necessary rightly to exercise such Power: It is clear to me, that I ought not to be the Scribe where Wills are drawn, in which some Children are made absolute Masters over others during Life. (p. 180)

The above scathing remark to slaveholders and enslavers challenged them to remember that what lies ahead is no guarantee that the slave master's children will have a chance to attain wisdom as might some slave child. He therefore refused to be used as an instrument to perpetuate an evil institution that makes some children masters over others.

Furthermore, Quaker emphasis on individual spiritual experience, which is at the origin of the diversity of theological perspectives within Quakerism, has Woolman laying the foundational basis of what more than two centuries after would come to be known as Critical Race Theory as Woolman drives home the idea that a people forced to work for the benefit of others and be deprived of the same cannot dispense their strength and energy in an industry benefitting not themselves but others (i.e. their oppressors), as those who dispense theirs to their own benefit and that of their offspring. He writes:

On the eleventh Day of the fifth Month, we crossed the Rivers *Patowmack* and *Rapahannock*, and lodged at *Port-Royal*; and on the Way we happening in Company with a Colonel of the Militia, who appeared to be a thoughtful Man, I took Occasion to remark on the Difference in general betwixt a People used to labour moderately for their Living, training up their Children in Frugality and Business, and those who live on the Labour of Slaves; the former, in my View, being the most happy Life: With which he concurred, and mentioned the Trouble arising from the

untoward, slothful, Disposition of the Negroes; adding, that one of our Labourers would do as much in a Day as two of their Slaves. I replied, that free Men, whose Minds were properly on their Business, found a Satisfaction in improving, cultivating, and providing for their Families; but Negroes, labouring to support others who claim them as their Property, and expecting nothing but Slavery during Life, had not the like Inducement to be industrious. (pp. 189-190)

Woolman, though not a clergyman in the strict *cum* traditional sense, was a lay Quaker minister who went from slave plantation to slave plantation to spread his message of social justice, egalitarianism, and thought and vision of ministration, allowing readers to interpret his writings without the filter of a clergy's authority. As he goes from one plantation to the other, he documents his revulsion and desire to be far away from any such happening. He writes:

The oppression of the slaves which I have seen in several journeys southward on this continent, and the report of their treatment in the West Indies, have deeply affected me, and a care to live in the spirit of peace and minister no just cause of offence to my fellow-creatures having from time to time livingly revived in my mind, I have for some years past declined to gratify my palate with those sugars. (p. 269)

The above excerpt is a clear illustration of the Quaker practice of silence and contemplation. It also highlights Woolman's introspective and meditative writing style which openly invites readers to engage with the text on a deep, personal level and allows for individual interpretation and reflection. Naysayers and critics of CRT will not welcome this claim of slaves (Africans) being oppressed. To them, there is no need to visit or revisit such oppression. There are many passages in Woolman's journal wherein

he dwells upon the moral implications of slavery and the suffering it causes. He often describes his emotional reactions to witnessing the conditions of enslaved Africans. It is clear that the oppressive conduct of the white people toward enslaved Africans affected him deeply and led him to heed the pure counsel of the Lord and to learn what his duty was in such cases. In his journal we read:

The exercise was heavy; and as I was reading what the Almighty said to Ezekiel, respecting his duty as a watchman, the matter was set home more clearly. With prayers and tears I besought the Lord for His assistance, and He in loving-kindness gave me a resigned heart. At a suitable opportunity I went to the public-house; and seeing the man amongst much company, I called him aside, and in the fear and dread of the Almighty expressed to him what rested on my mind. He took it kindly, and afterwards showed more regard to me than before. In a few years afterwards he died, middle-aged; and I often thought that, had I neglected my duty in that case, it would have given me great trouble; and I was humbly thankful to my gracious Father, who had supported me herein. (p. 164)

John Woolman's recognition of the suffering caused by slavery underscores his keen understanding of the systemic nature of the injustice that was pervasive more than two and a half centuries ago, and which in the 21st century US, though still pervasive, is contested. He further highlights, in describing an exchange with a slaveholder whose will John Woolman was called upon to write, the effect slavery had on him. He writes:

And in his last Sickness, as I was watching with him one Night, he being so far spent that there was no Expectation of his Recovery, but having the perfect Use of his Understanding, he asked me concerning the Manuscript, whether I expected soon to proceed to take the Advice of Friends in publishing it? And, after some Conversation

thereon, said, I have all along been deeply affected with the Oppression of the poor Negroes; and now, at last, my Concern for them is as great as ever. (p. 175)

Woolman's journal exemplifies Quaker testimonies, particularly the testimony against slavery and the testimony of simplicity. Readers may interpret how Woolman's life and writings embody these testimonies and what lessons can be drawn from them in the context of contemporary social and ethical concerns that go beyond John Woolman's 18th century world. Woolman's writings represent a particular historical and theological context within Quakerism. His views on social justice, including his anti-slavery stance, were radical for his time and even for today's 21st century America, in which understanding and explaining how the exploitation of man by man, in this case, based upon skin color, illuminates the plight of a cross-section of this country's population. His journal may therefore be apprehended in the light of the historical and social context in which he lived, as well as its relevance to contemporary issues in the United States of America 251 years after his death.

In essence, *The Journal of John Woolman* is a rich multilayered Quaker text that embodies many of the core principles of Quakerism. Woolman talks of the way in which enslavement informs the institution of slavery, the racial nature of the assault on enslaved Africans. This text allows for a multitude of interpretations and insights with which readers, whether Quaker or not, can engage in a way that resonates with their own personal spiritual or ethical perspectives, making it a timeless and thought-provoking work. Woolman is categorical in his assertion that the practice of continuing slavery is not consistent with the Christian religion; it is therefore a duty in all who profess that religion to cease from it;

and, in a quiet and peaceable manner, to use their endeavors to have it abolished throughout the world. He writes:

As I was riding along in the morning, my mind was deeply affected in a sense I had of the need of Divine aid to support me in the various difficulties which attended me, and in uncommon distress of mind I cried in secret to the Most High, "O Lord be merciful, I beseech thee, to thy poor afflicted creature!" After some time, I felt inward relief, and, soon after, a Friend in company began to talk in support of the slave-trade, and said the negroes were understood to be the offspring of Cain, their blackness being the mark which God set upon him after he murdered Abel his brother; that it was the design of Providence they should be slaves, as a condition proper to the race of so wicked a man as Cain was. Then another spake in support of what had been said. To all which I replied in substance as follows: that Noah and his family were all who survived the flood, according to Scripture; and as Noah was of Seth's race, the family of Cain was wholly destroyed. (p. 191).

One would be remiss not to mention how John Woolman's individual spiritual experience is a pathway to transformation, not only for him but for a reader who places themselves in Woolman's shoes. In this case, his journal captures his personal transformation as he grapples with the moral dilemma of slavery and pushes the 21st century reader to deal with the multiple voices and meanings that shoot off from his journal. He writes about his own spiritual growth and how his encounters with enslaved Africans in the colonies led him to make changes in his own life, including his refusal to profit from slavery. He invites the reader to follow his path to where he says, were he to speak to these people (i.e. enslavers) in support of the cause of righteousness, he would leave all and be as one of them. But upon remembering the saying of the Lord to the prophet, "I will make thee as a defenced brazen wall," he writes,

I have seen in the Light of the Lord that the day is approaching when the man that is most wise in human policy shall be the greatest fool; and the arm that is mighty to support injustice shall be broken to pieces; the enemies of righteousness shall make a terrible rattle, and shall mightily torment one another; for He that is omnipotent is rising up to judgment, and will plead the cause of the oppressed; and He commanded me to open the vision. (p. 237)

In sum, elements of Quaker testimonies, such as their simplicity and plainness of speech and style, peace, and integrity, are often applied to contemporary social and ethical issues. Quaker texts and writings are frequently engaged with and interpreted in the context of addressing present-day concerns, leading to a diversity of applications and perspectives. Isn't it true that John Woolman's journal provides a rich source of his arguments against slavery and his moral stance on the matter? Do the cited excerpts not reflect his understanding of the systemic nature of slavery's injustice? Wouldn't it be argued that such understanding goaded his advocacy for abolition and equality, his intersectional concerns, and his commitment to acting to effect change?

- Woolman's life and writings embody these testimonies and what lessons can be drawn from them in the context of contemporary social and ethical concerns.
- Passages describing happenings at Quaker meetings reveal the diversity of messages that can arise from individuals who feel led to speak.
- The varying meanings in these messages connect Woolman's overall spiritual journey to a quest that goes beyond that of a lone voice in the wilderness.
- Quakers advocated and still do advocate simplicity in lifestyle and personal conduct, which challenges extravagance and a covetous and greedy lifestyle. They

espouse living with integrity and in accordance with spiritual values.

- Their emphasis on the "Inner Light" and "the inner voice" holds that every individual has a direct connection to God and that God's guidance can be experienced through inner spiritual experiences, often through silence and meditation, which leaves every believer with a unique perceptiveness of divine opening.
- Woolman believed that all individuals, regardless of race, were equal in the eyes of God and should be treated as such. His journal documents his efforts to persuade fellow Quakers to renounce slavery and to take a stance against it.
- Quaker commitment to social and political equality, in which they believe all individuals to be equal in the eyes of God regardless of race, gender, or social status, runs afoul of contemporary international understandings of biogeographical variants. This belief has historically led Quakers to be active in various social justice movements, including abolitionism, the promotion of women's rights, and LGBTQ+ rights.

All in all, John Woolman's far-reaching insight can only be summed up in his own words when he writes:

Through the darkness of the times and the corruption of manners and customs, some upright men may have had little more for their day's work than to attend to the righteous principle in their minds as it related to their own conduct in life without pointing out to others the whole extent of that into which the same principle would lead succeeding ages. Thus, for instance, among an imperious warlike people, supported by oppressed slaves, some of these masters, I suppose, are awakened to feel and to see their error, and through sincere repentance cease from oppression and become like fathers to their servants, showing by their example a pattern of humility in living, and moderation in governing, for the instruction and

admonition of their oppressing neighbors; these, without carrying the reformation further, have, I believe, found acceptance with the Lord. (p. 261-262)

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Appendix

Curled from *The Journal of John Woolman*

To Friends on the Continent of *America*.

Dear Friends,—In an humble Sense of divine Goodness, and the gracious Continuation of God's Love to his People, we tenderly salute you; and are at this Time therein engaged in Mind, that all of us who profess the Truth, as held forth and published by our worthy Predecessors in this latter Age of the World, may keep near to that Life which is the Light of Men, and be strengthened to hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering, that our Trust may not be in Man but in the Lord alone, who ruleth in the Army of Heaven, and in the Kingdoms of Men, before whom the Earth is *as the Dust of the Balance, and her Inhabitants as Grasshoppers*. Isa. xl. 22. (Ndi, 178).

After some farther Conversation, I said, that Men having Power too often misapplied it; that though we made Slaves of the Negroes, and the *Turks* made Slaves of the *Christians*, I believed that Liberty was the natural Right of all Men equally: Which he did not deny; but said, the Lives of the Negroes were so wretched in their own Country, that many of them lived better here than there: I only said, there are great odds, in regard to us, on what Principle we act; and so the Conversation on that Subject ended: And I may here add, that another Person, some Time afterward, mentioned the Wretchedness of the Negroes, occasioned by their intestine Wars, as an Argument in Favour of our fetching them away for Slaves: To which I then replied, if Compassion on the *Africans*, in Regard to their domestic Troubles, were the real Motive of our purchasing them, that Spirit of Tenderness, being attended to, would incite us to use them kindly; that, as Strangers brought out of Affliction, their

Lives might be happy among us; and as they are human Creatures, whose Souls are as precious as ours, and who may receive the same Help and Comfort from the holy Scriptures as we do, we could not omit suitable Endeavours to instruct them therein: But while we manifest, by our Conduct, that our Views in purchasing them are to advance ourselves; and while our buying Captives taken in War animates those Parties to push on that War, and increase Desolation amongst them, to say they live unhappy in *Africa*, is far from being an Argument in our Favour: And I farther said, the present Circumstances of these Provinces to me appear difficult; that the Slaves look like a burthensome Stone to such who burthen themselves with them; and that if the white People retain a Resolution to prefer their outward Prospects of Gain to all other Considerations, and do not act conscientiously toward them as fellow Creatures, I believe that Burthen will grow heavier and heavier, till Times change in a Way disagreeable to us: At which the Person appeared very serious, and owned, that, in considering their Condition, and the Manner of their Treatment in these Provinces, he had sometimes thought it might be just in the Almighty so to order it.

I felt inward Relief; and, soon after, a Friend in Company began to talk in Support of the Slave-Trade, and said, the Negroes were understood to be the Offspring of *Cain*, their Blackness being the Mark God set upon him after he murdered *Abel* his Brother; that it was the Design of Providence they should be Slaves, as a Condition proper to the Race of so wicked a Man as *Cain* was: Then another spake in Support of what had been said. To all which, I replied in Substance as follows: That *Noah* and his Family were all who survived the Flood, according to Scripture; and, as *Noah* was of *Seth's* Race, the Family of *Cain* was wholly destroyed. One of them said, that after the Flood *Ham* went to the Land of *Nod*, and took a Wife; that *Nod* was a Land far distant, inhabited by *Cain's* Race, and

that the Flood did not reach it; and as *Ham* was sentenced to be a Servant of Servants to his Brethren, these two Families, being thus joined, were undoubtedly fit only for Slaves. I replied, the Flood was a Judgment upon the World for its Abominations; and it was granted, that *Cain's* Stock was the most wicked, and therefore unreasonable to suppose they were spared: As to *Ham's* going to the Land of *Nod* for a Wife, no Time being fixed, *Nod* might be inhabited by some of *Noah's* Family, before *Ham* married a second Time; moreover the Text saith, "That all Flesh died that moved upon the Earth." *Gen.* vii. 21. I farther reminded them, how the Prophets repeatedly declare, "That the Son shall not suffer for the Iniquity of the Father; but every one be answerable for his own Sins." I was troubled to perceive the Darkness of their Imaginations; and in some Pressure of Spirit said, the Love of Ease and Gain is the Motive in general for keeping Slaves, and Men are wont to take hold of weak Arguments to support a Cause which is unreasonable; and added, I have no Interest on either Side, save only the Interest which I desire to have in the Truth: And as I believe Liberty is their Right, and see they are not only deprived of it, but treated in other Respects with Inhumanity in many Places, I believe he, who is a Refuge for the Oppressed, will, in his own Time, plead their Cause; and happy will it be for such as walk in Uprightness before him: And thus our Conversation ended.

The Query was, "Are there any concerned in the Importation of Negroes, or buying them after imported?" Which they altered thus: "Are there any concerned in the Importation of Negroes, or buying them to trade in?" As one Query admitted with Unanimity was, "Are any concerned in buying or vending Goods unlawfully imported, or prize Goods?" I found my Mind engaged to say, that as we professed the Truth, and were there assembled to support the Testimony of it, it was necessary for us to dwell deep, and act in that Wisdom which is pure, or otherwise we could not prosper. I then mentioned

their Alteration; and, referring to the last-mentioned Query, added, as purchasing any Merchandize, taken by the Sword, was always allowed to be inconsistent with our Principles; Negroes being Captives of War, or taken by Stealth, those Circumstances make it inconsistent with our Testimony to buy them; and their being our Fellow-creatures, who are sold as Slaves, adds greatly to the Iniquity. Friends appeared attentive to what was said; some expressed a Care and Concern about their Negroes; none made any Objection, by Way of Reply to what I said; but the Query was admitted as they had altered it. As some of their Members have heretofore traded in Negroes, as in other Merchandize, this Query being admitted, will be one Step farther than they have hitherto gone: And I did not see it my Duty to press for an Alteration; but felt easy to leave it all to him, who alone is able to turn the Hearts of the Mighty, and make Way for the spreading of Truth on the Earth, by Means agreeable to his infinite Wisdom. But, in Regard to those they already had, I felt my Mind engaged to labour with them; and said, that, as we believe the Scriptures were given forth by holy Men, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and many of us know by Experience that they are often helpful and comfortable, and believe ourselves bound in Duty to teach our Children to read them, I believe, that, if we were divested of all selfish Views, the same good Spirit, that gave them forth, would engage us to teach the Negroes to read, that they might have the Benefit of them: Some, amongst them, at this Time, manifested a Concern in Regard to taking more Care in the Education of their Negroes.

The Friend who made this Proposal had Negroes: He told me, that he was at *New-Garden*, about two hundred and fifty Miles from Home, and came back alone; and that in this solitary Journey, this Exercise, in Regard to the Education of their Negroes, was, from Time to Time, renewed in his Mind. A Friend of some Note in *Virginia*, who had Slaves, told me, that he being far from Home on

a lonesome Journey, had many serious Thoughts about them; and that his Mind was so impressed therewith, that he believed that he saw a Time coming, when divine Providence would alter the Circumstances of these People, respecting their Condition as Slaves.

The Monthly-meeting of *Philadelphia* having been under a Concern on Account of some Friends who this Summer (1758) had bought Negro Slaves, the said Meeting moved it to their Quarterly-meeting, to have the Minute reconsidered in the Yearly-meeting, which was made last on that Subject: And the said Quarterly-meeting appointed a Committee to consider it, and report to their next; which Committee having met once and adjourned, I going to *Philadelphia* to meet a Committee of the Yearly-meeting, was in Town the Evening on which the Quarterly-meeting's Committee met the second Time; and, finding an Inclination to sit with them, was, with some others, admitted; and Friends had a weighty Conference on the Subject: And, soon after their next Quarterly-meeting, I heard that the Case was coming to our Yearly-meeting; which brought a weighty Exercise upon me, and under a Sense of my own Infirmities, and the great Danger I felt of turning aside from perfect Purity, my Mind was often drawn to retire alone, and put up my Prayers to the Lord, that he would be graciously pleased to strengthen me; that, setting aside all Views of Self-interest, and the Friendship of this World, I might stand fully resigned to his holy Will.

Many faithful Brethren laboured with great Firmness; and the Love of Truth, in a good Degree, prevailed. Several Friends, who had Negroes, expressed their Desire that a Rule might be made, to deal with such Friends as Offenders who bought Slaves in future: To this it was answered, that the Root of this Evil would never be effectually struck at, until a thorough Search was made into the Circumstances of such Friends as kept Negroes, with respect to the

Righteousness of their Motives in keeping them, that impartial Justice might be administered throughout. Several Friends expressed their Desire, that a Visit might be made to such Friends as kept Slaves; and many Friends said, that they believed Liberty was the Negroes Right: To which, at length, no Opposition was made publickly. A Minute was made more full on that Subject than any heretofore; and the Names of several Friends entered, who were free to join in a Visit to such as kept Slaves.

About the Author

Bill F. Ndi, Professor of Modern Languages, Communication, and Philosophy, is an interdisciplinary scholar par excellence and Fellow of the Booker T. Washington Leadership Institute, as well as Faculty Senate Chair at Tuskegee University. He has published extensively: *Outward Evil, Inward Battle: Human Memory in Literature* with Adaku T. Ankumah, Benjamin Hart Fishkin, and Festus Fru Ndeh; *Fears, Doubts, and Joys of not Belonging, The Repressed Expressed*, and *Living (In)Dependence: Critical Perspectives on Global Interdependence* with Adaku T. Ankumah and Benjamin Hart Fishkin. His most recently edited work is *Some Unsung Black Revolutionary Voices from Pre Colony to Post Colony and Beyond*. The Pan African Writers Association recently appointed Bill F. Ndi as the Coordinator of Writers of African Origin in the Diaspora (WAFORD).

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