

Religious Society of Friends' Historical Relationship with African Americans

Vanessa Julye and Donna McDaniel

This text is a combination of the two yearly meeting talks, each of which emphasized different people and events from that particular yearly meeting:

Baltimore Yearly Meeting opening lecture, July 27, 2004.

New England Yearly Meeting keynote address, August 7, 2004.

Religious Society of Friends' historical relationship with African Americans
Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship writers Donna McDaniel and Vanessa Julye share some of the findings from their three years of research and writing. This text combines presentations at Baltimore and New England Yearly Meetings.

Here is an excerpt from the epistle produced by New England Yearly Meeting:

Our opening speakers, Vanessa Julye of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and Donna McDaniel of NEYM, ministered to us from their leading to research the relationship of Quakers of European descent and African American Quakers and non-Quakers. Their address dispelled the myth of widespread Quaker commitment to racial equality. We have too often been led by only a courageous few who were willing to answer God's call to justice despite the disapproval and censure of the broader Quaker community. Many New England Friends benefited directly from slavery: commercial and other relationships blinded Friends' eyes and hardened their hearts to its human horror. Friends of African descent were denied membership in meetings and relegated to benches at the back of our meetinghouses. In recent years, we seem unable to sustain an active and vibrant corporate commitment to racial equality.

DONNA

The Civil War was approaching when Quaker abolitionist Abby Kelley Foster, a woman of European descent from Worcester, had a prediction that still informs us today: If "the slave is freed only out of consideration for the safety of the Union, the hate of the colored race will still continue, and the poison of that wickedness will destroy us as a nation — the poison of that wickedness will destroy us a nation."

—As quoted in Carleton Mabee, *Black Freedom*, p. 336.

VANESSA

The hardest lesson my Heavenly Father ever set me to learn, was to love Friends, and in anguish of spirit I have often queried, why the lord should require me to go among a people who despise me on

account of my complexion, but I have seen that it is designed to humble me, and to teach me the lesson, “Love your enemies, and pray for them who despitefully use you.”
— Margaret Hope Bacon, Sarah Mapps Douglass, *Faithful Attender of Quaker Meeting: View from the Back Bench*, p. 6.

DONNA

These two quotations from our work speak particularly to each of us. Each of us also wants to share just a bit about what this work means to us personally. Vanessa will do that now. I will do it at the end of our talk.

VANESSA

The quote I just read to you is from a pamphlet from QuakerPress of Friends General Conference released last year. This pamphlet is on the life of Sarah Mapps Douglass, an African American who attended Arch Street Meeting in Philadelphia in the mid-1800’s. The quote I read was from a letter that Sarah Mapps Douglass wrote to English Quaker Elizabeth Pease in 1839 sharing her mother Grace’s feelings about Friends. I began researching Friends of African descent because I needed to know who they were, their accomplishments and experience in Quakerism. It was important to me to help me to be able to put my experience in context within the Religious Society of Friends in the 20th and 21st centuries. I know our past shapes our present day relationships with each other. Now that I have a better understanding of our full history, I see how we arrived to where we are today.

DONNA

As you can imagine, we could add many more compelling quotations to the two we’ve spoken, but in the time we have we can only sample what we have learned in the last three years. We have found certain themes emerging from our research. Tonight we will offer our five themes. Each is followed by a few examples of why we believe it may be valid. Yet we are aware that each theme in itself is a subject worth more detailed research.

VANESSA

Theme 1: As Friends struggled with the issue of enslavement, they held different beliefs on what their religion required of them.

DONNA

Theme 2: Friends’ economic circumstances played a large role in their stance on the continuing enslavement of Africans.

VANESSA

Theme 3: Most anti-slavery and anti-racist work that Quakers look back on with pride has been carried out by a few courageous individual Friends following their own clear and strong leadings.

DONNA

Theme 4: The fear of “amalgamation”—of racial mixing—that was pervasive in the 19th century—and continues to this day—influenced Friends as it did the general European-American population.

VANESSA

Theme 5: Friends' concerns about African Americans and African American freedom appear to ebb and flow.

DONNA

The words we use are not always our own. However, for ease of listening we have not included the citations. A transcript complete with citations plus a bibliography and list of websites will be posted on the NEYM and FGC websites.

[Baltimore only:] During the question and answer period, we invite your questions and comments on our themes. We have been doing this work for three years and are still learning. Our workshop also offers a way to continue the discussion.

VANESSA

Theme 1: Friends differed in their belief of what their religion required of them as they struggled with the issue of enslavement.

Friends' views on enslavement in the 1700s were likely to fall into one of these four categories developed by Thomas Drake, a Quaker historian of European descent:

- 1) A majority of Friends accepted slavery "without much qualm or question."
- 2) Others were "perplexed, but did nothing."
- 3) And others "agreed with Englishman George Fox" that slaves should be treated "kindly" and offered a Christian education, but would go no further.
- 4) Finally, a "sensitive few doubted if Christians should be enslaving their fellow men.

—Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, p. 9.

DONNA

The voices of these "sensitive few" were not easily heard, but they had many different reasons for believing Quakers should not hold slaves, among them:

- Enslavement was contrary to the "Golden Rule"
- To control the life of another human being was to prevent that person "from reaching God."
- Enslavement violated the peace testimony. Violence was inherent in slavery and the enslaved people considered to be "prize goods," the proceeds of that violence
- Enslavement created a "cycle of evil," becoming both the cause and result of avarice and licentiousness. It led to "conspicuous consumption" and the insatiable desire for more wealth.
- Enslavement often led to the separation of husband and wife, thus encouraging adultery. It also tore families apart when enslaved people were sold to other owners.
- Enslavement might provoke insurrection which could put Friends in the position of having to respond with violence.
- Various sources.

VANESSA

There were Friends, however, who did not believe that they or their Quaker brethren were wrong to be enslavers. In the South, including Maryland and Virginia, enslavement was already well entrenched when Quakers arrived. Some Friends apparently justified the custom on the ground that unbaptized Africans were “not Christians and, therefore, could be held in bondage.”

— J. Reaney Kelly, *Quakers in the Founding of Anne Arundel County, Maryland*, p. 87.

A majority of Friends of European descent had absorbed the societal view that African Americans were naturally ignorant. Thus, they could reason that it would be irresponsible to free people unable to survive on their own.

DONNA

And in every yearly meeting there were members who owned enslaved Africans. Thus, meetings were quite reluctant to take a stand that would “reflect discredit” on those European American Friends. Even meetings opposed to the practice were aware of the financial repercussions for those whose businesses depended on enslaved laborers, especially in the South.

—Jack Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748-1783*, p. 276.

VANESSA

Years and years of appeals to European American Friends from individual Quakers and meetings to end their involvement with enslavement came to fruition in the middle 1700s. Several forces came together at the right time.

One such force was a movement to reform the Religious Society of Friends initially sparked by a few American and British Friends who believed Quakers in both countries had become “spiritually dull” and “callous.” It was time to “restore and refine the ‘primitive purity’ of the society.” — Marietta, p. 35

Reformers who saw that the purity had been lost largely to Friends called attention to the Quakers’ growing attachment to wealth and power. The direct connection between those worldly attachments and their enslavement of people of African descent was being drawn more clearly. Now there was a listening when European American John Woolman spoke of “a cycle of evil.” —Marietta, p. 126.

DONNA

While the reforms first reached their “fullest expression” among Philadelphia Friends, ultimately they flowed into the wider Quaker community, for there was a continuing stream of epistles and traveling ministers connecting Friends in the colonies and England as well.

VANESSA

A second factor was a major change in yearly meeting leadership in New England, Virginia, and Philadelphia. After years of domination by owners of enslaved Africans, between 1738 and 1754 the control of the meetings passed to European American Friends who supported the reforms.

—Jean Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, p. 32.

DONNA

However, as European-American author Forrest Wood observed in *The Arrogance of Faith*, “...what was glaringly absent from most of these [reformers’] expressions on the sinfulness of owning slaves was a concern for the suffering of the enslaved. If slavery was an abomination for the slaveholder, what was it for the slave?”

—Forrest Wood, *The Arrogance of Faith*, p. 286.

VANESSA

Woolman was one of the few Friends who showed concern for the good of the enslaved person. He believed that the principles of Christian brotherhood and the golden rule applied equally to all men.

He wrote in his *Journal*,

These are the people by whose labour the other inhabitants are in a great measure supported. . . .

These are a people who have made no agreement to serve us, and who have not forfeited their liberty that we know of. These are souls for whom Christ died, and for our conduct toward them we must answer before that Almighty Being who is no respecter of persons.

—*Journal of John Woolman*, Moulton edition, p.66.

DONNA

Quakers did go on to end enslavement by members of their religious society in the 1780s—the first denomination to do so. After the Revolutionary War they began to petition the new Congress frequently—and unsuccessfully—to end the slave trade. And some Quakers joined those who were now working for the end of enslavement in their new country.

—Among many sources: Drake, pp. 100-113; Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, p. 83

VANESSA

Just as Friends of European descent had responded differently at first to calls to end their own enslavement of Africans, so did they differ as well about what their religion required of them in this new endeavor to end enslavement by others.

In the 1830s, when abolitionism began to make a stir in the country as a whole, all Friends did agree that enslavement was an evil that should be ended. Like many others, they were “anti-slavery.”

However, not all were for abolition, or certainly not the immediate abolition advocated by the most radical leaders.

—Larry Gara, “Who Was An Abolitionist?” in Martin Duberman, ed., *The Antislavery Vanguard*, pp. 32 ff.

DONNA

Friends of European descent differed considerably about what they should do to end enslavement. It was “not a question of action or non-action,” wrote European American Friend Rufus Jones of these differences later. It was “a question of the right way to initiate action.”

—Rufus Jones, *History of Early Quakerism*, Vol. I, p. 35.

There were many shades of Quaker attitudes in this matter. Using a broad brush, we describe the differences this way:

VANESSA

On one side were Friends who believed the freedom of the enslaved rested in God’s hands and in God’s own time.

On the other were the more vocal radicals who felt God was calling them to write and preach and work actively for abolition.

DONNA

The first and by far the larger number believed that Friends must await divine direction. Thus, considering abolitionism, the 1835 Hicksite Baltimore Yearly Meeting advised Friends “to retire to the Divine Gift within ourselves and seek after that ‘Wisdom that is from above. May we carefully avoid putting forth our hands to a work to which we have not been divinely called....’” —Drake, p. 149.

VANESSA

These Friends believed that the end of enslavement would come in God’s own time—not the humans’ and through God’s power, not human reasoning. European-American Friend Nathan Shoemaker represented this belief when he wrote: When will this vexed question cease to agitate our Society? I had rather not hear it touched upon in our meetings for worship. I do not believe it is a part of gospel ministry. In the Lord’s own time this oppressed people will be delivered. —Bliss Forbush, Moses Sheppard, p. 172.

DONNA

Another difference concerned mingling with non-Friends. To some, this “mingling” compromised the basic principles of Quakerism. Thus it was unacceptable for Friends to join non-Quakers in abolition societies, groups that were based on the creaturely wisdom of the world.

VANESSA

In 1841 Indiana Yearly Meeting quoted the Bible to warn of the consequences of mingling by recalling that Ephraim of old “mixed himself among the people [and] strangers have devoured his strength and he knoweth it not.”

The next year the Maryland Hicksites issued a “solemn warning” in that regard: Friends should avoid any involvement with the associations that promote abolition “by political or other means of a coercive nature, devised in the wisdom and contrivance of man....” —Drake, p. 148; — Errol Elliott, *Quakers on the American Frontier: A History of the Westward Migrations, Settlements, and Developments of Friends on the American Continent*. pp. 91-92. Walter Edgerton, *A History of the Separation of Indiana Yearly Meeting*, p. 48.

DONNA

Friends living in the “slave states” were also warned not to interfere with the rights of those who did enslave. Baltimore Yearly Meeting in the 1840s asked members to exhibit “a benevolent regard” for others who had been so long in a place where enslavement was well accepted and who were thus “very much blinded to the iniquity of the system and its awful consequences.” —Forbush, Moses Sheppard, p. 171.

In New England, yearly meeting ministers cautioned European Americans Elizabeth Buffum Chace and her father Arnold Buffum “not to give way to excitement, but to keep in the quiet and wait for divine guidance; and not to unite with people outside of our religion in public undertakings.” Buffum Chace reported that those who had already made their anti-enslavement sentiments known were ignored in the appointment of committees or dropped from their existing memberships. “Known Abolitionists [were treated] as suspicious persons to be overlooked and avoided,” she said. —Elizabeth Buffum Chace, *My Anti-Slavery Reminiscences (around 1831) in Virtuous Lives, Four Quaker Sisters Remember Family Life, Abolitionism, and Women’s Suffrage*, Lucille Salitan, Eve Lewis Perera, editors, pp. 97-98.

VANESSA

A major point of disagreement between the two groups was the use of meetinghouses. While the more radical Friends saw meetinghouses as a logical place to use in the cause of anti-slavery, the larger group believed that meeting houses were not to be used for meetings by outsiders or even for Friends' abolitionist gatherings because:

—Non-Quakers should not preach or speak in a meeting house;
—and in their meeting houses, Quakers should wait for messages from God, not listen to prepared speeches.

—Various sources, including Drake, p. 145, 171, 174; Thomas Hamm, "Hicksite Quakers and the Antebellum Nonresistance Movement," Church History December 1994, pp. 557-569.

DONNA

The radicals saw the apparent inaction of other Friends as just a way to postpone serious thought about enslavement. They believed their duty was to "oppose slavery by every available means." To do anything less was to be for enslavement. — Drake, pp. 160-161. Mabee, pp. 7-8.

VANESSA

Jacob Ferris, a Friend of European ancestry from Farmington Quarter, New York, expressed the more radical view in this 1843 statement:

It is, to me, absurd that, at this day and age, Friends should talk about keeping to the quiet. Have they not, since the first rise of their society, been agitating the public? Their testimonies are calculated to do so, and, I believe, the agitation has been productive of great good to the world.

— Christopher Densmore, "The Dilemma of Quaker Anti-Slavery: The Case of Farmington Quarterly Meeting, 1836-1860," Quaker History 82 (Fall 1993, No. 2), pp. 84-85.

DONNA

But those who stood with Ferris were in the minority and a number were disowned, usually with a "convenient excuse" for the disownment.

—Drake, p.158.

VANESSA

New England Yearly Meeting disowned abolitionist Buffum, first president of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, ostensibly for reasons other than his anti-slavery entreaties to the Meeting. Buffum went on to Indiana where he joined other "agitators" who eventually were removed from the Yearly Meeting to become the "Indiana Yearly Meeting of Anti-Slavery Friends." — Drake, pp. 162-165.

DONNA

European American New York minister George White, who opposed anti-slavery openly and said he'd rather be a slave than an abolitionist, took it as his mission to see that abolitionists "within the Hicksite fold were disowned in New York and Philadelphia." He succeeded with European Americans Isaac Hopper and Isaac's son-in-law James Gibbons, thus prompting the resignations of Isaac's daughter and James' wife, Abby, and Isaac's three sons. Similarly, Buffum Chace had resigned after her father's disownment.

— Drake, pp. 161-162; Margaret Hope Bacon, *In the Shadow of William Penn*, Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends, pp. 29-30.

VANESSA

European American Lucretia Mott became White's next target. He traveled to Philadelphia in the hopes of convincing Mott's meeting to disown her for preaching in New York without a traveling minute. The meeting wasn't convinced; however, later it denied her a traveling minute for 15 years. (She continued her ministry just the same.) —Bacon, *In the Shadow of William Penn*, pp. 29-30.

DONNA

The abolitionists believed they were the true Friends who were following God's will, even though the rest of the society considered them radicals. Quaker European-American abolitionist Angelina Grimké made it clear God was leading her:

'Tho' the path seems to be beset with trials [and] temptations, yet I am willing to go because I believe the Master has sent me out and that he will be near to help and to guide me in every strait and difficulty. I expect nothing less than the loss of my membership in the Society of Friends. I do consider the restrictions placed on our members as so very anti-christian that I would rather be disowned than to be any longer bound by them.

— Larry Ceplair, ed., *The Public Years of Sarah and Angelina Grimké*, Selected Letters, p. 82.

VANESSA

Some Friends supported colonization, the scheme to transport free African Americans to Africa, the Caribbean, or the American west.

Elijah Coffin, the European-American clerk of the Indiana Orthodox Yearly Meeting envisioned an independent nation of people of African descent "in the great American desert, with blacks forcibly removed to it, if necessary."

—Thomas Hamm, April Beckman, Marissa Florio, Kirsti Giles, and Marie Hopper, *Quakers and African Americans in the Middle West, 1800-1870*, p. 17.

DONNA

Some African Americans liked the idea as well. African American Quaker and New England ship captain and owner Paul Cuffe was one. He worked hard for colonization because he was convinced that the lot of the African in the United States could never be a very happy one. Africa seemed to him "a more inviting prospect." —Drake, p. 125.

VANESSA

Cuffe's plan was to establish trade with Africa based on goods, not human beings. Toward that end he traveled with a minute from his meeting to Washington and to England to develop a trading relationship with Sierra Leone. Cuffe brought the first group of free African Americans to Africa in 1815 but he died not long after.

—Rosalind Cobb Wiggins, *Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letters, 1808-1817: A Black Quaker's "Voice from within the Veil,"* pp. 58-70.

DONNA

Moses Sheppard, a European American Friend in Baltimore, was one who agreed with Cuffe that Africa was, indeed, “a more inviting prospect.” Like others, Sheppard believed that colonization could be a way of ending enslavement without violating individual rights or using violence. Sheppard devoted much of his life to working for the success of the colony, sending a constant stream of supplies and tools and cash, most accompanied by personal letters encouraging those who were doing well and urging on those who weren’t.

Sheppard was one of those who believed sincerely that colonization was a “an attempt to benefit a few now, in the hope that it may hereafter be beneficial to many.” He would agree with the Virginian who wrote that it would “remove from our country every vestige of domestic slavery, without a single violation of individual wishes or rights.” —Forbush, Moses Sheppard, pp.133, 296.

VANESSA

But most abolitionists were completely opposed to colonization. Indiana Friend of European ancestry Levi Coffin was one who saw it as “an odious plan of expatriation concocted by slave holders, to open a drain by which they might get rid of free Negroes, and thus remain in more secure possession of their slave property.”

—Stephen Weeks, *Southern Quakers and Slavery*, p. 234.

DONNA

Although we might agree that abolitionists were actively witnessing the testimony of equality in their work, their interaction with African Americans is not always consistent with that testimony. Many of the most fervent European American abolitionists did not regard the free or enslaved Africans as their equals.

VANESSA

A certain paternalism and self-interest can be found in the way that Friends’ of European descent witnessed to their concern for the free African Americans, as well as the newly-freed enslaved Africans. Relationships were most often at arm’s length. Afraid their manumitted slaves would become a public burden and thus damage their own reputation in the community, the help of Friends’ of European ancestry emphasized industriousness and pious behavior.

—Various sources including Soderlund, pp. 184-185.

DONNA

Samuel Ringgold Ward gives us the view of an African American who escaped on the Underground Railroad to become an abolitionist and minister. Ward wrote that Quakers “will give us good advice. They will aid in giving us a partial education—but never in a Quaker school, beside their own children. Whatever they do for us savors of pity, and is done at arm's length.”

—Quoted in Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, p. 72.

VANESSA

As we looked at the religious and moral reasons behind the 200 years of Friends’ engagement with the issues of slavery, we also began to see the great influence economics had in the unfolding events. Our second theme emerged:

DONNA

Theme 2 : Friends' economic circumstances played a large role in their stance on the continuing enslavement of Africans. Northern commercial interests, including those of Quakers, became more and more intertwined with the enslavement economy of the south.

VANESSA

Let's look again at the 100 years it took Friends of European descent to free themselves of enslaving others, this time from an economic viewpoint.

It is clear that the people who traded, owned, and/or benefited from enslavement dominated Yearly Meetings.

DONNA

“Quakers [of European ancestry] were important in the slave trade in the eighteenth century in New England, especially in Newport, where [for example] the Wanton family was still trading slaves in the 1760s.” European American historian Hugh Thomas's research on the slave trade revealed Friends prominent in the trade in Pennsylvania, as well, often carrying slaves here from the West Indies. — Hugh Thomas, *The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870*, p. 298.

VANESSA

In Newport, the Redwood and Hazard families of European Ancestry owned slave plantations in the West Indies and Thomas Richardson of European descent, New England Yearly Meeting Clerk for 41 years (from 1728-1769), “participated in the slave trade.” —Thomas, p. 298.

DONNA

While Friends of European ancestry were among the ranks of northern enslavers, the dilemma for southern Quakers was even worse because freeing their enslaved laborers within that system would almost certainly mean financial ruin. Many who were unwilling to give up their lives of ease were either disowned or left the Society of Friends. —Kenneth Carroll, “Maryland Quakers and Slavery,” *Quaker History*, Vol. 72 (Spring 1983), p. 40.

In North Carolina and Virginia, great numbers of Friends who freed their enslaved left to begin life over in the Midwest. In North Carolina and Virginia, great numbers of Friends who freed their enslaved left to begin life over in the Midwest or in the city. Virginia Yearly Meeting lost 14 of its 31 meetings between 1763 and 1800. But many who had become accustomed to a life of ease were unwilling to give that up. They were either disowned or left the Society of Friends. —Forbush, Moses Sheppard, p. 60, and Jay Worrall, *Friendly Virginians*, p. 263.

VANESSA

And, as we have seen, within the yearly meetings, both North and South, the control rested in the hands of those who benefited from enslavement. Of crucial importance was their control of the committees that decided what Friends could—and could not—print.

Early voices against Quaker enslavement were regularly disowned for publishing anti-slavery tracts without permission of the yearly meeting's “Overseers of the Press.” Ralph Sandiford and Benjamin Lay, both men of European descent were disowned in Philadelphia in the 1730s, while John Farmer of European ancestry was disowned by both New England and Philadelphia Yearly Meetings for refusing to stop reading his papers aloud. Such was the Overseers' power that Woolman waited seven years after writing his first document against enslavement to seek their approval.

—Drake, pp. 34-35, 43-47, 54, Hugh Barbour and J. William Frost, *The Quakers*, p. 123.

DONNA

As time went by, those leaders, of course, were getting older and “losing their dominant position,” while their critics were gaining supporters, particularly as the society turned more and more to reforming itself.

—Arthur Worrall, *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast*, pp. 160-61.

VANESSA

As the 1800s began, northern Quakers, having cleared their Society of enslavement, were united in believing enslavement was wrong, but far from united in what, if any, overt action they should take. While clearly questions of appropriate Quaker practice were involved, as we mentioned earlier, there were also economic considerations.

DONNA

As the 19th century progressed, Quakers, like other Northerners, began to benefit more and more from the products of enslavement.

They were, for example, shipping merchants, the manufacturers of cotton and of textile machinery, and owners of department stores, and other associated businesses.

VANESSA

Buffum Chace described her distress about Friends she met at New England Yearly Meeting: “Alas! Their commercial relations, their political associations, and with many, their religious fellowship with the people of the South, so blinded the eyes, hardened the hearts and stifled the consciences of the North, that we found very few people who were ready to give any countenance or support to the new anti-slavery movement. —Buffum Chace, pp. 97-98.

DONNA

But we also find an inspiring case to the contrary—a Yearly Meeting, namely North Carolina—that acted to free its slaves and transport them out of the state at considerable sacrifice and suffering without regard to how it was hurting them economically.

VANESSA

As, Hiram Hilty, the European American historian of North Carolina Quakerism, wrote: “The remarkable thing about this episode in philanthropy was not so much its cost in time and money, however, but the extraordinary tenacity of the minority group in the midst of an often hostile slaveholding society. It was not a fad lasting a few months or a few years, but a serious dedication to a cause that lasted from 1777 until the Civil War. For three generations, from father to son, the doctrine that the white Christian must treat his black brother ‘as he would be done by’ was maintained not only as an article of faith, but also in deed.”

— Hiram Hilty, *Toward Freedom*, pp. 86-87.

DONNA

“It was not enough simply to free those whom they had received in inheritance”, “Hilty wrote, but

they undertook vigorous legal action to recover black persons from manstealers ...and [fought] costly legal battles to get possession” of freed slaves who had been bought again. —Hilty, *Toward Freedom*, pp. 86-87.

VANESSA

Many Virginia Quakers left for the Midwest as well, while Maryland Friends tended to go to western Pennsylvania as well as Ohio. Large numbers of Maryland Friends lived in the areas where the great mass of labor was performed by enslaved people. When they left, they too incurred financial losses. One Maryland historian described their “financial sacrifice—voluntarily incurred for conscience’ sake” as without parallel.

—J. Saurin Norris, *The Early Friends (or Quakers) in Maryland*, p. 24.

DONNA

We have given just a few examples of the impact of economics on Friends’ testimonies. Now we skip ahead way ahead to the twentieth century to mention briefly another case of economic influence, this time revealed in some Friends’ schools commitment to integrate..

VANESSA

First, we know that the fear of losing students and/or donor support was an inhibiting factor as Friends’ schools considered the admission of students of color.

DONNA

In 1937 Media Friends School, near Philadelphia, one of the first to admit an African American student, faced an enrollment drop from 93 to 62. The school survived thanks to the board and some “weighty” Friends who agreed to cover any loss in revenue and the school recovered within three years. The lesson for other Friends schools seemed to be to take great care in informing and involving parents of such a move. Less positively, the experience of Media Friends confirmed their worst fears—that enrolling African American students would bring decreased enrollment.

—Sue Gold, “Bearing Witness to a Fresh Revelation of Truth: The Desegregation of Media Friends School in 1937” in Pat Macpherson, Irene McHenry, and Sarah Sweeney-Denham, editors, *Schooled in Diversity, Readings on Racial Diversity in Friends Schools*, p. 65.

VANESSA

Perhaps that fear lingered at Baltimore Friends School in 1953 when the education committee made this statement:

It was “aware,” the committee said, ”of its responsibility to many groups who have created and supported the School in the past and who are concerned in its future.

—Dean R. Esslinger, *Friends for Two Hundred Year: A History of Baltimore’s First School*, pp. 161–162

DONNA

[But] it does not believe that any large number of Friends, alumni, parents, teachers, or students are prepared for a change in admissions policy” [the change being to admit African American students]—at the present time. “No doubt,” the committee continued, a growing number look to a change in the future. Until then, the committee believed “steps should be taken to educate all groups

interested in the School in the many facets of the problem involved in achieving the ideal of Christian brotherhood.”

—Dean R. Esslinger, *Friends for Two Hundred Year: A History of Baltimore’s First School*, pp. 161–162

VANESSA

Theme 3: Most anti-slavery and anti-racist work that Quakers look back on with pride has been carried out by a few courageous individual Friends following their own clear and strong leadings. As we have seen, the Society of Friends was, to say the least, not generally supportive of its more outspoken members.

We offer you examples of a few of these prophetic Friends of European descent.

DONNA

In the late 1600s a handful of Germantown Friends were the first to petition Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to end slave holding and the slave trade. (It was to be almost 90 years before the Yearly Meeting was free of slaveowners.)

For the next half century, a number of Friends whose names aren’t as familiar prepared the way for Woolman or took up where he left off, as did Mott. These Friends, often the lone voices and under great pressure to conform, risked the censure of other Friends and even disownment as they persistently petitioned their quarterly and yearly meetings to end the slave trade and slaveholding and defied publication committees by printing tracts laying out their position.

VANESSA [read only at Baltimore]

Among these lesser known “courageous few” were European-American Friend James Soney of Kent County, Maryland, who in his will of 1674 manumitted two enslaved people and gave them 200 acres and his cattle. William Berry and William Dixon of Third Haven Meeting, both of European ancestry, freed the four people they enslaved in 1685 and 1708, even as the first voices against enslavement were being generally ignored in the Society of Friends.

—Carroll, pp. 27-28.

DONNA

The author of the first antislavery paper to be officially approved by a Quaker meeting was Elihu Coleman. In 1720 this young Quaker carpenter from Nantucket wrote “A Testimony Against the Unchristian Practice of Making Slaves of Men,” which rather unexpectedly, given the connections of its leaders, was approved for publication by New England Yearly Meeting. —Drake, pp. 37-38. Worrall, p. 158.

Another of the “few” was European-American Warner Mifflin, of the Virginia Mifflins, though he moved to Duck Creek Meeting in Delaware. By manumitting his own slaves in 1774 and compensating them for their past labor, this Friend set the tone not only for the rest of his wealthy Quaker family and his meeting, but for others who kept enslaved people in the state as well.

—Drake, pp. 75-76, 107.

VANESSA [read only at Baltimore]

European-American Friend Benjamin Lundy was a “connecting link” between the anti-slavery workers of the 1700 and 1800s. Lundy traveled some 25,000 miles, at least 5,000 on foot lecturing and leaving behind new societies of “awakened citizens and a trail of abolitionist newspapers.” — Vivien Elizabeth Sandlund, “To Arouse and Awaken The American People”: The Ideas And Strategies of The Gradual Emancipationists, 1800-1850,” pp. 2-3. Jesse Macy, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade*, p. 30.

DONNA [read only at Baltimore]

In the mid-1820s Lundy helped operate a free produce store in Baltimore and published the best known of the earliest anti-slavery newspapers, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*. It was in Baltimore that he had his brief but celebrated partnership with William Lloyd Garrison, perhaps the best known abolitionist of the time. Garrison had been only mildly committed to ending enslavement until he heard Lundy’s stronger views. Although the partnership was short-lived, Garrison wrote that he owed everything he had done in the cause of anti-slavery to Lundy. — Quoted in Macy, p. 33.

VANESSA [read only at Baltimore]

Most widely known for his daring rescues to prevent free African Americans from being sold into enslavement, European-American Baltimorean Elisha Tyson’s most important work for the formerly enslaved was done out of the public eye. In 1800, like his first cousin Moses Sheppard, Tyson retired from business to devote his life to “improving the lives of those less fortunate than he,” principally helping the formerly enslaved find justice.

—Gianna Abruzzo, “The Annals of Baltimore: Elisha Tyson 1749-182,”

www.geocities.com/College_Park/Union/3417/intro.htm 7/25/2003. Barbara Mallonee, Jane Bonny, and Nicholas Fessenden, *Minute by Minute; A History of the Baltimore Monthly Meetings of Friends; Homewood and Stony Run.*, p. 169.

DONNA [read only at Baltimore]

In perhaps the most famous of his rescues, Tyson rowed to a ship in the harbor at midnight to rescue a kidnapped free African. The ship captain, brandishing a dagger, warned that anyone who tried to board the ship would be a dead man. “Then I will be that man,” said Tyson, leaping on board. Tyson is said to have saved over 2,000 free African Americans from reenslavement.

—Abruzzo; Weeks, p. 120.

DONNA [read only at New England]

Sarah Smiley, a New England minister born in Vassalboro, Maine, was not one to be intimidated. To secure the supplies she needed for her post-Civil War relief work, she went to the Secretary of War at his home to get funds and then rode the freight train carrying those goods to North Carolina for 13 hours. Smiley was one of the rare Friends who observed that, while Quakers were committed to ministering to the African Americans “physical and intellectual needs and to awakening their desires after holiness,” they did not invite them to their own meetings.

—Linda Selleck, *Gentle Invaders. Quaker Women Educators and Racial Issues During the Civil War and Reconstruction*, pp. 144-148, 159.

VANESSA [read only at New England]

A quick glance at other New Englanders: We've mentioned Buffum Chace of Rhode Island. Like other abolitionist mothers, she "believed that every mother in the country should convert her children to the cause." She took her seven children along to lectures, anti-enslavement pageants, and protests. Lillie Chace Wyman, her oldest daughter, was proud to be "hit by a stone" during one such event.

— Elizabeth C. Stevens, "Motherhood as a Subversive Activity in Nineteenth Century Rhode Island," *Quaker History*, vol. 84 (Spring 1995, no. 1), pp.42-45, 53

DONNA

Earlier I quoted Kelly Foster who was one of the first women to address "promiscuous audiences" (mixed sexes) and was as outrageous as she was courageous. She called the clergy, "thieves, robbers adulterers, pirates, and murderers" for being complicit with enslavement. And was regularly bodily removed from their churches—and Ohio Yearly Meeting (Orthodox) in 1845. She resigned from her Uxbridge meeting just before they disowned her.

—Bacon, *Valiant Friend*, p. 89; Dorothy Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time* p. 145; Bacon, *My Slave Sister*, p. 33. Drake, p. 159.

Another Friend who removed himself before the inevitable disownment was James Monroe of East Greenwich, Rhode Island. He was discouraged by Friends' "almost total apathy to the miseries of three millions of the great brotherhood of man, deprived of every right that humanity can claim, and subjected to every outrage that humanity can suffer."

—Kathryn Grover, *The Fugitive's Gibraltar: Escaping Slaves and Abolitionism in New Bedford, Massachusetts*. pp. 32-33.

VANESSA

William Bassett of Lynn, Massachusetts, was eventually disowned for openly defying Quaker authorities by publishing writings that chastised the Friends for their lack of support for abolition and for allowing separate seating for African Americans in meetings. —Drake, p. 159.

DONNA

As many as two hundred Quaker women, the "Gentle Invaders," to use author Linda Selleck's term, were a veritable army of teachers who went south after the Civil War to open schools for the freed people under the most adverse and dangerous circumstances. We can only make this brief mention and recommend Selleck's book to learn more of these courageous women. "Gentle" perhaps but also brave enough to rise in the night to face down a mob of horsemen come to burn down their simple school house.

—Selleck, *Gentle Invaders*.

VANESSA

On behalf of Indiana Yearly Meeting, the Clarks, Alida and Calvin, headed the Southland School in Arkansas which for 60 years primarily trained African American teachers. The Friends meeting at the school numbered at one time almost 300 members, all but a few African American, and proudly recorded African American Daniel Drew as a minister in Indiana Yearly Meeting in 1870.

—Thomas Kennedy, "Southland College: The Society of Friends and Black Education," *The Southern Friend*, p. 44.

DONNA

We mention, too, the school supported for many years by New England Yearly Meeting that also accepted African Americans as full members. The Normal and Agricultural Institute at Maryville, Tennessee, had forty-five members of African descent in its meeting by 1880.

—Francis Anscombe, “Contributions of Quakers Toward Reconstruction of the Southern States,” dissertation, p. 21. Indiana Yearly Meeting Minutes 1872-1878.

VANESSA

Here we also want to clarify the “courageous few” and the Underground Railroad.

Although known for their work for the fugitives, Friends did not all agree on the morality of supporting the Underground Railroad. Those who did support it cited a “higher law,” including Deuteronomy 23:15—“Thou shalt not deliver unto his masters the servant who has escaped from his master unto thee.”

—Bacon, Lamb’s Warrior, p. 119.

DONNA

Other Friends thought aiding fugitives was against the testimonies of peace and integrity. They were concerned about the violence and the secrecy that could put them in difficult positions. In 1843 North Carolina Friends openly condemned “those Friends who have given ‘shelter improperly’ to slaves.”

As Baltimore had done just the year before, the North Carolina Yearly Meeting minuted its “utter disapproval of such interference in any way whatever” with the slaveowners’ right.”

—Larry Gara, “Friends and the Underground Railroad,” Quaker History Vol. 51, No. 1 (Spring 1962), p. 17; Hilty, By Land and By Sea, p. 52.

VANESSA

Some Friends did “risk life, limb, and fortune, if necessary, for the cause of the helpless slave....” But like other legends, there is both truth and exaggeration.

The question then is, “If just a few Friends were leading the way, why is it that we Quakers have such a good reputation for working on the Underground Railroad and being abolitionists?” Like any other legend, there is both truth and exaggeration in this statement.

DONNA

Some answers:

As African American historian Charles Blockson explains it, Friends “early and consistent stand against slavery” did make them stand out compared to other denominations. Thus evolved the familiar image of “slaves seeking out men with broad-brimmed hats” who would “invariably aid them in their flight to freedom....”

—Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*, pp. 5-6.

VANESSA

Some of the supposedly factual accounts of the Underground Railroad were actually highly fictionalized, often including unsubstantiated statements such as “many of the conductors were Quakers.” Feeding the myth was the fact that two of the characters in the very popular novel, *Uncle*

Tom's Cabin, were Quaker. Philadelphia's role as a hub for the Underground Railroad also encouraged the idea of heavy Quaker involvement. — Gara, *Liberty Line*, p. 185.

DONNA

Overemphasizing Friends' involvement led to underemphasizing the role of the free people of African descent. What is true, in the words of African American Quaker historian Emma Lapsansky, is that "The Underground Railroad was fundamentally the entrepreneurial effort of African Americans, assisted by whatever array of white people they could muster to assist with some, or all of their escapades, or simply...to look the other way. The muscle and backbone of the Underground Railroad," she says, "were black."

—Emma Jones Lapsansky, lecture at Drexel University, January 17, 2002.

VANESSA

Theme 4: The pervasive fear of "amalgamation" influenced Friends as it did the general European-American population.

Like other people of European descent, much of the European-American Quakers' unwillingness to admit African Americans as members in the Society of Friends or as students in their schools and colleges, or, in fact to interact with them socially can be attributed to just one thing—a deep-seated aversion to the idea of mixing the races. The fear of "amalgamation," to use the word of the 19th century, can, in turn, be attributed to the then-commonly held view that African Americans were a lesser primitive race, innately ignorant and uncultured.

DONNA

We will see how this fear of amalgamation reveals itself in many aspects of Friends' lives.

Membership in meeting: European American historian Gary Nash wrote that the "Quakers' strong fear of interracial mingling burst into the open in 1795, when Hannah Burrows, a light-skinned woman," who frequently attended meeting, sought membership in a Philadelphia Friends meeting. "'The chief objection,' in the assessment of one leading Quaker, was that if membership were granted, 'the privilege of intermarriage with the whites could not be withheld,' and 'such mixtures are objectionable.'" — Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community*, p. 180.

VANESSA

"Friends only reluctantly opened their religious Society to colored members, and they wished no more than other whites of their day and generation to associate with different races on terms of social intimacy."

In the North, fear of close social contact led to separate "colored benches" in meetings. A few radicals—or shall we call them prophets?—complained of the inconsistency" of "Negro benches and waged a successful campaign in the late 18th Century to admit Negroes...." Membership was thus "possible...but not common." —Drake, pp. 120-121.

DONNA

The fear of amalgamation permeated Friends' social interaction with African Americans.

Lapsansky speaks of "Those Friends who gave, at best, lip service to black peoples' liberation movements, [but] who certainly had no interest in entertaining black people in their homes or

meetings.” Lapsansky zeroes in on this issue with a simple question: “Would they invite an African American home for dinner?”

Rarely would an abolitionist have been able to answer “yes.”

VANESSA

Friends were good at trying to right obvious wrongs, but “the complex problems of permanent racial adjustment extended far beyond their capacity for solution.”

Mott, who did invite her African American abolitionist sisters to dinner, was distressed to discover that her mother, who Mott had regarded up until that point as the most truly democratic woman she knew, was not at all happy to learn of this close companionship.

—Drake, p. 120. Beverly Wilson Palmer, remarks during “Rediscovering Lucretia Coffin Mott: A Fearless Feminist,” Swarthmore seminar on Lucretia Mott, April 24, 2002, celebrating release of her book: *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott*.

DONNA

“For virtually all friends, interracial marriage was more than they could bear; even committed abolitionists like Levi Coffin opposed it.”

—Hamm, Beckman, Florio, Giles, and Hopper, p. 17.

And now we look at how this fear of amalgamation plays out in Friends educational institutions.

Key figures in the desegregation of Friends’ schools spell out quite clearly the reasons they objected to admitting African American students:

VANESSA

Sidwell Friends School was slow to integrate. Board of Trustees President Austin Stone, a European American Friend who resisted all entreaties to integrate the school, justified his opposition in a 1954 letter:

I am frankly puzzled as to how some of my friends reach the conclusion that it is unchristian not to admit Negroes to schools where there are both white girls and boys. In the ultimate, I know of no reason why it should be considered unchristian to try and maintain a family relationship on a white basis. Crudely, I would not consider it unchristian of me if I endeavored to do what I could to prevent my children from marrying Negroes.

Is my thought in this regard unchristian? I hope not. It was my father’s also. —Mr. Sidwell’s School: *A Centennial History*, pp. 168-169.

DONNA

When Swarthmore reneged in 1933 on admitting a top Philadelphia student when they discovered he was African American, President Frank Ayedelotte, a European-American, was asked to explain the college’s admissions policy. He wrote:

There are certain social difficulties which are peculiar to this college and which make the admission of a Negro student more difficult than would be the case in another institution. Swarthmore is a co-educational and residential college. The life here is very intimate, and it would consequently be more difficult to make a Negro student comfortable than would be the case in a large institution or in a small one which was not run on such intimate coeducational lines. And you can readily see that it would not be a solution of the problem to admit Negroes to classes if we were not prepared to make them at home socially.

— Frank Ayedelotte, letter to Carl Murphy, President of the Afro-American Company of Baltimore, dated September 22, 1933.

VANESSA

Earlham historian European American Thomas Hamm described interracial dating as “the most divisive, if not inflammatory, racial issue of these years” at the college.

In the spring of 1952, Grace Cunningham, daughter of Clarence Cunningham, the first African American graduate of Earlham, announced her engagement to Robert McAllester, a student of European descent. The two seniors planned to marry after graduation, but European American college President Thomas Jones saw their “act of defiance” that showed no understanding of “the problem of the college.”

—Thomas Hamm, *Earlham College: A History, 1847-1997*, pp. 205-206.

DONNA

Administrators foresaw anxious parents withdrawing hundreds of students and alumni reacting adversely. McAllester was suspended for the last semester. They did marry (and, by the way, remain so to this day.) —Hamm, p. 206.

VANESSA

Theme 5: Friends’ concerns about African Americans and African American freedom appear to ebb and flow.

We have seen a certain pattern to Friends’ interests in aiding African Americans and in working against racism. Nineteenth century Friends were active in the earlier part of the century, first as abolitionists and then in far greater numbers work to provide relief for the displaced former slaves and support schools for the freed people during and after the Civil War. But then comes a period of little Quaker activity or, in fact, little activity by liberals of European ancestry in general.

DONNA

There were, as before, the voices of the “few” trying to urge Friends on. One was African American Quaker Barrington Dunbar of New York, an acknowledged “thorn” in the side of Friends during the Civil Rights movement. We quote from his 1968 message:

Quaker Meetings are a social club “where people meet to pursue their common interests in isolation from the rest of the community. We attend meetings to escape the agonies of an unjust society and to find personal refuge among like-minded Friends. Because our hearts are not stirred or our minds made sensitive to the injustices of the communities in which we live, we accommodate ourselves to a whole system...that has served to reinforce the assumption of white superiority....”

—Barrington Dunbar, *Black Power’s Challenge to Quaker Power*,” September 1968, in *A Quaker Speaks From The Black Experience: The Life And Selected Writings Of Barrington Dunbar*, James A. Fletcher and Carleton Mabee, editors.

DONNA [read only at Baltimore]

Quakers trying to stir other Friends’ minds to those injustices. In 1969 Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s Social Order Committee issued a “suburban challenge”— “How aware are we of what is going on?” Meetings were asked to reflect on whether they were working “vigorously” to create equal opportunities for all. (A number did report many activities and many were silent.)

The committee's "challenge" covered many areas—but two examples: Were meetings contacting educators, realtors, and employers to let them know their opinions about equality? Did they know what is being taught in their local schools to create "an increase awareness of the feelings of other segments of American society?"

—Proceedings of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, Aug. 1-6, 1969, p. 6; July 31-Aug. 5, 1970, p. 60; July 30-Aug 4, 1971, pp. 60-62.

VANESSA [read only at Baltimore]

A special query from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting raised similar questions.

What are we doing through our Meeting to eliminate the spirit and practice of racism

a) in our personal friendships?

b) in our Meeting activities?

c) in the civic, social and business groupings of which we are a part?

How are our Meetings enriching the lives of our children through intercultural and interracial activities and associations?

What are Friends doing to make their community more inclusive?

—Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Letter to Clerks of All Monthly Meetings from William Eves 3rd, General Secretary; Fifth month, 1958.

This query was written in 1958--forty-six years ago—and could still be written today.

VANESSA

Still, some Friends in the 20th century, including many in this yearly meeting, spent great amounts of time, energy, and money working to counteract the pervasive racism. It's impossible in a few minutes to convey the variety of that work. When we spoke at Pendle Hill last year, we offered a visual sense of that work by listing activities of individual Friends and Quaker organizations on large newsprint pages posted along the walls. The years from 1920 through 1970 took 17 easel-sized sheets, listing projects from open housing and fair employment to, integrated schools and public facilities, and for personal connections between the races.

Yet it seems that by the last quarter of the century Quaker activity came in fits and starts and faded away. Here is a brief view of how that looked in New England Yearly Meeting.

DONNA [read only at New England]

In 1969, the yearly meeting's commitment to working against racism was challenged by visiting speaker, African American Erna Ballantine, chairman of the Massachusetts Commission against Discrimination. Said Ballantine:

Friends think of themselves as persons of good will, but too often that good will comes across as patronizing. Friends too often talk of the good works they have done in the past instead of what they are going to do in the future in response to rapid change.

—Skip Schiel, *How We Have Responded to Racism In and Among Us; A Chronicle of New England Yearly Meeting Decisions & Actions 1965-1998*, Revised March 1998, p. 1; Schiel noted that some of his material came from a report by Gene Boyington,

VANESSA [read only at New England]

The next year the yearly meeting committed itself

to an undertaking to help our brothers find their way to that state of self determination they desire; we shall see whether our actions equal our professions. —NEYM Minutes, 1970, pp. 51-53.

A special committee created in 1970 to raise funds for an inner city project reported that “the broad body of New England Friends has not really gotten under the weight of this concern.” Donations came in from only fifteen (out of forty) meetings. Often one or two individuals donated, not the whole meeting. Friends were urged to “respond thoughtfully to the great needs of our brothers.” Local meetings were asked to develop programs on racism.

—NEYM Minutes, 1970, p. 22; Schiel, p. 2.

DONNA [read only at New England]

Also in 1970 European American Francis Crowe of Peace and Social Concerns urged meetings to join Project Equality, a program encouraging fair employment practices. Few actually joined. The 1970 yearly meeting had three workshop sessions, three plenaries, and a special session on “Friends Responsibility for Victims of Prejudice and Poverty.” Friends minuted that they were “clear that the radical love relationship among men requires us to strip away our own hypocrisies, self-delusions, and prejudices if we are to soar in obedience to the winds of God. Such love will require that we reorder the priorities in our lives. And we are clear that one element of loving one’s brother is to help him to be his best self as he, not we, envision that best self.”

A special subcommittee was to raise \$100,000 over five years “to be used to constructively relieve the hurt of prejudice and poverty.”

—NEYM 1970, Minutes, pp. 16, 51-52

VANESSA [read only at New England]

By 1975 the \$100,000 had been raised and grants made to several “self-help” projects, but Friends’ interest was waning. Only seven monthly meetings responded to queries about prejudice and a request to hold discussions and report back. As European American Friend Skip Schiel wrote, “What had been a concern felt and acted on Yearly Meeting-wide” had become the concern of a few members of committees; the yearly meeting’s interest “in corporate social action became limited to issuing public statements, requiring nothing of its members.” —Schiel, p. 3.

DONNA [read only at New England]

Nine years later the Yearly Meeting’s 1984 Epistle reported that speakers and programs had presented “clearly the reality of oppression.”

“It is painful for us to recognize the reality of racism, sexism, over-consumption, political and social intolerance and militarization in our own country. Although the oppression may not be our fault, it is our responsibility to heal. It is difficult to bridge the chasms which separate us from our brothers and sisters at home and around the world. Can we transform ourselves and release the kind of love which empowered early Friends? “To dwell in receptive silence’ is not enough; we must examine ourselves.” —NEYM Minutes, 1984, p. 47.

VANESSA

As we hear these words from twenty and thirty years ago in this yearly meeting, we heard our own queries:

Why, with the clarity expressed in these minutes of several decades ago, are we still addressing the issue of racism?

What has stopped us from truly witnessing to our testimonies of equality and justice?

DONNA

Why do we still ask ourselves what we can do to eliminate racism in our society and the world? And what will it take for us to be engaged in the issue of racial justice on an ongoing basis as we are with, say, peace issues?

DONNA (Note that this is a combination and expansion of comments that because of time constraints were somewhat different or shorter at the Baltimore and New England Yearly Meetings.) Vanessa shared earlier about what this work has meant to her. I have a few minutes to do that now, although I would really need hours, not minutes, to begin to say what I would like to say to you. This work has transformed my understanding of where this country is in terms of racial justice and equality, namely that we have come nowhere near to achieving what we (say) we want for America. We have not had nor do I think we have today the political or moral will to pursue the promises we believe in.

When we began to learn of Friends' reluctance to work for the enslavement of the Africans they possessed themselves or to work for freeing the enslaved people in the new country, I was very disappointed in Friends. I had much higher expectations. But as we moved on to Reconstruction, I realized that Friends and others of European descent were living in an insidious toxic fog that was deliberately created. I'll use but two examples to explain.

Reconstruction: There was no real plan for the lives of the freed people after the Civil War. Any ideas became a political football (to use a modern analogy) between Congress, the parties, and the president. The only thing that was reconstructed was the sharecropping system that kept the newly freed people in a condition only technically better than enslavement. Both the North and the South wanted to maintain a cheap supply of labor in the South and to assure the continuation of "white supremacy." Thus, the system was held in place by ever more restrictive Jim Crow laws and by terrorism—lynchings (far more and far more barbaric than I had ever known). The oppression was buttressed by a deliberate propaganda campaign—one described in the book entitled *The Black Scare*.

And so I grew to appreciate more the courage of the few Friends and others who were able to make their way through the poison that Abby Kelley Foster had predicted.

Civil Rights was a learning experience, too. Of course the movement itself was magnificent. What wasn't magnificent was the lack of real federal commitment. The government was slow to enforce the *Brown vs. Bd.* case, so slow that force became necessary. The Civil Rights Act which we've been celebrating this year was never adequately funded or given the personnel needed for real enforcement.

If we have any doubt about where we are today, we need only remember what African American intellectual Manning Marable calls the unholy trinity of "mass unemployment, mass incarceration, mass disfranchisement."

Doing the work I have done suggests to me that the issues of racism are far more complex than we can imagine. I suggest that one reason Friends seem to keep asking "what shall we do?" is that we are not grounded enough in our knowledge and understanding of the past or of contemporary African American concerns and thinking. I believe if we would read African American history and literature and follow contemporary African American thought and news through magazines such as *The Crisis* of the NAACP, we would find openings.

We need to listen, not create our own agenda. This was a lesson learned during the Black Power movement when activist Friends had difficulty understanding that African Americans wanted to develop their own agenda—not that of liberals of European descent like Friends, and wanted to lead the liberation movement themselves, again, not follow the people of European descent.

Today there is a vigorous and healthy debate going on within the African American community—Bill Cosby’s recent comments were not his alone. (If you don’t recognize what this refers to—ask around until you find someone who knows!) Those views are one position in the fascinating debate about what needs to be done to break the despair of the African American underclass—what should be done and who should do it. Friends who want to work for racial justice need to understand that debate. They need, too, to understand the changing balance in the Hispanic and African American populations, a subject covered in some detail in a recent issue of the *Crisis*. All of us need to learn what these are communities saying—this will be the America of our children.

If you are moved to take some action, I suggest volunteering in a community agency operated by African or Hispanic or Asian or Native Americans. Listen. Do whatever work needs to be done—filing, entering data, painting the walls. Again, I believe that way would open to answer “what shall I do?”

(Baltimore) And we can begin now by praying.

(Ending was part of a prayer from Henri Nouwen’s *With Open Hands*—see below)

(New England) To return to the questions that Vanessa and I were asking at the end of our talk, I would like to add this query: Twenty-five years ago in this meeting there were Friends telling you much of what Vanessa and I have told you and asking you the same questions. Will there be Friends twenty-five years from giving the same message? My prayer is that sooner than that there will be Friends standing before you to report on what the members of this yearly meeting have been doing to witness to our testimonies of equality and justice, mindful as we are that without justice, there is no peace. My prayer is that the prediction of Abby Kelley Foster that I spoke at the beginning will not come true.

(In Baltimore, parts of this prayer were read at the end of the talk. In New England, the whole prayer was read to open the intergenerational Meeting for Worship the next morning.)

Conversion to God, therefore, means a simultaneous conversion to the other people who live with you on this earth. The farmer, the worker, the student, the prisoner, the poor, the black person, the white person, the weak, the strong, the oppressed and the oppressor, the sick one and the one who heals, the tortured and the torturer—not only are they people like you, but they are also called to recognize with you that God is a God for all people.

Thus, compassion removes all pretensions, just as it removes false modesty. It invites you to understand everything and everyone, to see yourself and others in the light of God and joyfully to tell everyone you meet that there is no reason to fear: the land is free to be cultivated and to yield a rich harvest.

It is not so simple, however. Risks are involved. For compassion means to build a bridge to others without knowing whether they want to be reached. Your brother or sister might be so embittered that he or she doesn’t expect anything from you. Then your compassion stirs up enmity. It is difficult not to become sour yourself and say, “You see what I told you, it doesn’t work anyhow.” And yet, compassion is possible when it has roots in prayer. For in prayer you do not depend on your own strength, nor on the goodwill of another, but only on your trust in God. That is why prayer makes

you free to live a compassionate life even when it does not evoke a grateful response or bring immediate rewards.

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