The Germantown Petition Against Slavery: Crash Course Black American History #5

Crash Course: Black American History
https://youtube.com/watch?v=XT8q6cYsVpc
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/XT8q6cYsVpc

Hi, I'm Clint Smith, and this is Crash Course Black American History.

If you're like me, you love breakfast. Pancakes, waffles, french toast, bacon, sausage.

You name it, I am here for it. And one other breakfast food that I love, and that my kids really love, is oatmeal, especially with some raisins, maybe some diced strawberries, and some cinnamon!? Man, shout out to Quaker Oats.

Speaking of which, did you ever wonder why they're even called Quaker Oats? Well, part of the reason we have a random 17th century Quaker man on the front of the box is because people have long associated Quakers with qualities of goodness, and peace, and honesty.[1] Which are qualities you like to see in people...and in your oatmeal? (But, for the record, Quaker Oats has no association with the actual Quakers.) Anyway, today we're going to take a closer look at the Quakers in early America, including their varying opinions and relationships to slavery, which led to many disagreements within the group, as well as one of the first abolitionist documents in the North American colonies. INTRO By the late 1600s, British North America had become well accustomed to the practice of slavery.

Though it was not nearly as integral to the economy in the north as it was to the south, the practice did expand rapidly, including in the Delaware Valley region of Philadelphia,. Pennsylvania. Slavery in this region began in 1684 with the arrival of some 150 captives aboard the.

British vessel, the Isabella. The slave ship brought a highly sought after commodity to Philadelphia, free labor, tapping into the colonists' desire to obtain enslaved workers. Soon, enslaved Africans would make up around a seventh of the city's entire population.

The colony of Pennsylvania had been founded by a man named Willam Penn, who himself was a Quaker, but not the man on the Quaker Oats box. The Quakers, whose denomination of Christianity developed in England in the mid-seventeenth century, were also a significant portion of Philadelphia's population during this time. Quakers's beliefs were pretty different--and in some ways radically different--than other.

Christian groups. For example, they were one of the first to argue that individuals could realize spiritual freedom through their own inner light--that people could communicate /directly/ with God, so priests weren't really needed to do so. Quakers were also well known for being forerunners of the abolitionist movement.

But as always with history, it's complicated. We should make clear that even though Quakers as a whole were at the forefront of abolitionist work, within the denomination there were people with a range of views on the subject. Some Quakers, far from being abolitionist or even indifferent to chattel slavery, even participated in the transatlantic slave trade themselves.

In the seventeenth century, many Quakers in the Caribbean, for example, purchased captives in Barbados in what some of them rationalized as a form of evangelism, an effort, they said, to civilize these Africans and convert them to Christianity. In her book, Christian Slavery, historian Katharine Gerbner discusses the experiences of English Quaker George Fox to highlight some of the complexities in Quaker history when it comes to the issue of slavery. She emphasizes the stark contrast between Quakers who held anti-slavery beliefs and those whose primary concern was maintaining quote "well-ordered Quaker Households with. Christian Slaves." Fox, regarded as the founder of Quakerism, was a already a proponent of "universal evangelization," and during a trip to Barbados in 1671, when he had the opportunity to witness slavery first hand, his conceptions of Christianity were made to confront slavery directly. You might think that witnessing the violence and barbarity of enslavement would have deeply unsettled anyone who purports to hold Christian views, and would have made clear to them that slavery was inconsistent with their faith. Right?

Well, no. Instead, during his trip Fox spoke of what he saw as deplorable promiscuity and polygamous relationships among the enslaved (even though, we should note, there were often forced breeding practices imposed on them). And Fox said he was shocked and angered to find that plantation owners in Barbados had no intention of trying to convert their labor force to Christianity.

Something he saw as essential. So no, it wasn't the horrific, violent nature of Caribbean slavery that sent him over the edge. Instead it was the belief that quote: "the Gospel [should be] preached to every creature under Heaven." Apparently he saw no contradiction between the idea of a loving God, and the barbarous institution in front of him that was perpetuated in God's name.

We should note that Fox wasn't alone in what today we clearly see as a moral paradox. This evangelical approach, which provided justification for those participating in the slave trade, was actually not considered controversial at the time. In Pennsylvania, it was not uncommon for Quaker leaders to own enslaved laborers.

Even William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, purchased laborers from Quakers who owned plantations in Barbados. Penn and other Quaker leaders simply believed that slavery was necessary to secure the economic welfare of this developing colony. There were, however, still many Quakers who opposed slavery on moral grounds.

And Quakers would later become one of the most influential white religious groups to lead anti-slavery protests. They even provided direct aid to the abolitionist movement and the underground railroad. Let's go to the thought bubble.

In 1688, four German-Dutch Quaker men presented what would become known as the Germantown. Protest, at a monthly local meeting in Dublin, Pennsylvania. But we're not talking about a big public protest like with signs and chanting or anything like that.

This was a written protest, a petition, with a list of demands advocating that the Quakers form a united front and publicly endeavor to end slavery. The four men who drafted this petition -- Gerret (GEHR-eht) Hendricks, Derk up de Graeff (DUR-keh. UHP deh GRAYF), Francis Daniell Pastorius (PAA-STOHr-ee-uhs), and Abraham op den Graef (OHP DEH-neh GRAYF) -- made their complaints based on the fundamental Quaker beliefs that each human being is of unique worth.

The Germantown petition, named for the location where it was drafted, became one of the first formal documents to denounce the institution of slavery on moral and practical grounds. These Quakers openly challenged the logic behind slavery and the violence enslaved laborers were subjected to. Unfortunately, although many prominent Quakers shared these sentiments, they weren't willing to turn those sentiments into action.

And primary source documents from the time reveal that it received…a less-than-enthusiastic response. After listening to the petitioners and "inspecting the matter," the official response of the. Meeting was that, given the nature of the complaint, it was best that they not "meddle" in the issue.

They claimed it was too "weighty" of a problem for them to try to resolve at that time. They decided to pass the issue off to a Quarterly Meeting, then it was passed to officials at the yearly meeting where, ultimately, the full gathering would also reject the petition. Thanks, Thought Bubble.

Even though the petition was ultimately unsuccessful, the way it laid out the hypocrisy of many of their fellow Quakers was really significant. In their draft, these Quaker men called out the hypocrisy of enslavement, pointing out that it was a direct violation of several fundamental Christian values. The petition pointed out that enslaving people is a pretty direct violation of the Golden.

Rule. You know the one we learn in kindergarten: treat others the way you want to be treated. The petition read in part, "we shall doe to all men like as we will be done ourselves; making no difference of what generation, descent, or colour they are." The petitioners also appealed to the strong sense of family that is essential to Quaker beliefs.

They stated that Africans families had no chance at survival under the oppressive institution of slavery: "Pray, what thing in the world can be done worse towards us, than if men should rob or steal us away, and sell us for slaves to strange countries, separating husbands [sic] from their wives and children". They also made a special note that you shouldn't buy stolen goods, framing it as a larger moral issue tied to enslavement. "We who profess that it is not lawful to steal, must likewise, avoid to purchase things as are stolen, but rather help stop this robbing and stealing if possible." This is important because in the petition, they stressed that Africans were captives brought to the Americas against their will, and for that reason, they too, are stolen. Our impassioned petitioners even suggested that the hypocrisy was so blatant, that slavery's very existence in the colony prevented Quakers in other areas of the world from migrating to Pennsylvania because of this clear contradiction of their values and practices.

Given the social and political context of the moment, it is perhaps not surprising that this petition was rejected by land-owning white men who were still working to establish their place in the American colonies. But, the letter itself is still important for us to learn about because it serves as documentation of abolitionist-thought among white immigrants in the United States. Moreover, it served as a strong ideological foundation for many Quakers, who were later even more actively engaged in the abolitionist movement spanning the 18th and 19th centuries.

So as you can see, there were some groups--or groups within groups--of white immigrants who recognized the maltreatment of enslaved Africans, and whose fight against it is documented in writing from well over 300 years ago. And their argument was rooted in something most colonial regions could relate to: Christianity. The four Quaker men who presented the Germantown petition in 1688 drew inspiration from the.

Bible to make plain the contradictions, and the inhumanity of slavery. At the same time, as we saw in the case of George Fox, it would be too simple to suggest that these were the beliefs of all Quakers -- they weren't, and it's important for us to complicate and problematize any rhetoric that suggest all Quakers were against slavery. Many were, but certainly not all.

And this should be a lesson we carry with us throughout our journey through all of American history: we should be wary of overgeneralizing any group of people. There are often a range of opinions, perspectives, and ideas that exist within any group, Quakers or otherwise. The Germantown protest also showcases the significance of white people recognizing that they themselves had a moral and human stake in the fight for Black liberation.

This is a concept we will continue to explore throughout this series. Thanks for watching. I'll see you next time.

Crash Course Black American History is made with the help of all these nice people and our animation team is Thought Cafe. Crash Course is a Complexly production. If you wanna keep imagining the world complexly with us, you can check out some of our other channels like Healthcare Triage, Animal Wonders, and Scishow Psych.

And, if you'd like to keep Crash Course free for everybody, forever, you can support the series at Patreon; a crowdfunding platform that allows you to support the content you love. Thank you to all of our patrons for making Crash Course possible with their continued support. _____ [1] https://www.quakeroats.com/about-quaker-oats/quaker-history