

Analyzing the Germantown Petition Against Slavery

Directions: Read *the introduction* to the document and then *the primary source document itself* before answering the questions below in complete sentences.

1. Who were the authors of this document? What was their background that influenced their thinking?

2. Who is this petition directed towards?

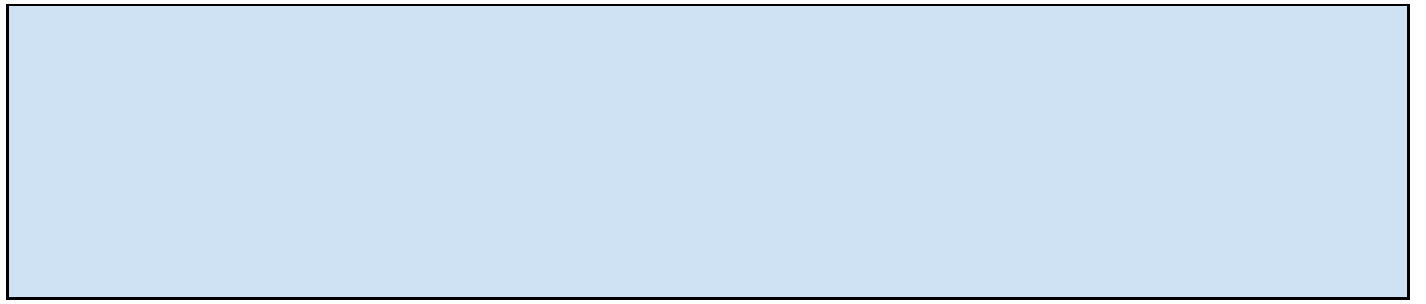
3. Why did the authors of the petition have a different perspective than most colonists?

4. What arguments to they make against slavery?

5. “Anti-racism is the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably.”

- The National Action Committee on the Status of Women:

Is this document “anti-racist”? Why or why not?

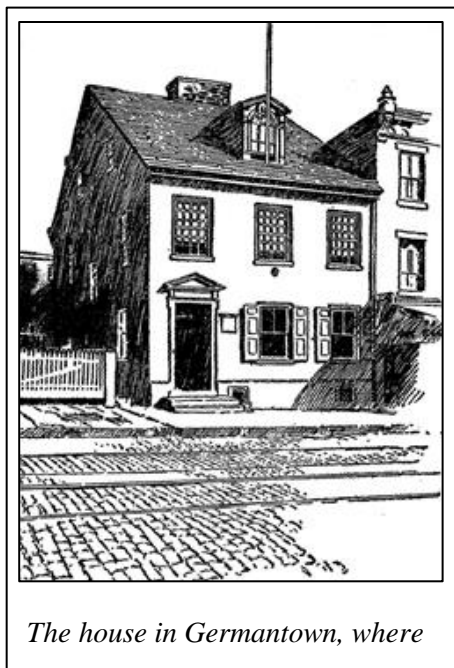


The 1688 Germantown Quaker Petition Against Slavery

Pennsylvania was founded in 1682 by William Penn as an English colony where people from any country and faith could settle, free from religious persecution. Penn had converted to Quakerism and had been imprisoned several times for his beliefs.

Penn invited people from his native England and from other European countries to settle the colony. He organized Philadelphia as a welcoming town laid out in a grid with many green spaces and profited by selling lots. Soon, the waterfront was a bustle of activity and churches of several faiths were established. Merchants traded with the nearby Quaker colony of West Jersey. The town and surrounding countryside prospered.

Some of the early English settlers to Philadelphia and its surrounding towns were wealthy and purchased enslaved men and women to work on their farms. Although many such enslavers had immigrated to escape religious persecution, they saw no contradiction to enslaving others.



The house in Germantown, where

The slave trade was protected by the British crown and some thought it necessary for economic growth in the colonies. It was justified by racism and intolerance towards what many British saw as “uncivilized” cultures.

Many of the first settlers to Germantown (today an area in Northwest Philadelphia) were German Quaker and Mennonite families who were accepted into the Philadelphia Quaker community. However, in several ways they felt themselves outsiders, which allowed them to see and question what the English could not. Some attended Quaker Meetings temporarily, while they waited for a Mennonite minister to arrive, and then helped to build the first Mennonite Meetinghouse.

The German-Dutch settlers were unaccustomed to slavery, although from the shortage of labor they understood why their British neighbors relied on slave labor. The Germantowners saw a fundamental similarity between the right to be free from persecution on account of one’s religious beliefs and the right to be free from being forced to work

against your will.

In 1688, five years after Germantown was founded, Francis Daniel Pastorius and three other men wrote a petition based upon the Bible’s Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” urging the community to abolish slavery.

The 1688 *Germantown Quaker Petition Against Slavery* was the first protest against African American enslavement made by a religious body in the English colonies. It argues that every human, regardless of belief, color, or ethnicity, has rights that should not be violated.

The three authors signed it on behalf of the Germantown Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. Clearly a highly controversial document, Friends forwarded it up the hierarchical chain of their administrative structure--monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings--without either approving or rejecting it.

The 1688 petition was the first American document to make a plea for equal human rights for everyone and has been called America’s first anti-racist document. In a world where slavery continues in different forms, the 1688 petition seems relevant to many people because of its statement on the nature of human suffering and institutions that conspire to continue injustice based on power and tradition.

A Minute Against Slavery, Addressed to Germantown Monthly Meeting, 1688

This is to ye Monthly Meeting held at Richard Worrell's.

These are the reasons why we are against the traffic of men-body, as followeth. Is there any that would be done or handled at this manner? viz., to be sold or made a slave for all the time of his life? How fearful and faint-hearted are many on sea, when they see a strange vessel,—being afraid it should be a Turk, and they should be taken, and sold for slaves into Turkey. Now what is this better done, as Turks do? Yea, rather is it worse for them, which say they are Christians; for we hear that most are brought hither against their will and consent, and that many of them are stolen. Now, though they are Black, we cannot conceive there is more liberty to have them slaves, as it is to have other white ones.

There is a saying, that we shall do to all men like as we will be done ourselves; making no difference of what generation, descent or color they are. And those who steal or rob men, and those who buy or purchase them, are they not all alike? Here is liberty of conscience, which is right and reasonable; here ought to be likewise liberty of body, except of evil-doers, which is another case. But to bring men hither, or to rob and sell them against their will, we stand against.

In Europe there are many oppressed for conscience sake; and here there are those oppressed which are of a black color. And we who know that men must not commit adultery. Some do commit adultery, in others, separating wives from their husbands and giving them to others; and some sell the children of these poor creatures to other men. Ah! do consider well this thing, you who do it, if you would be done at this manner? And if it is done according to Christianity? You surpass Holland and Germany in this thing. This makes an ill report in all those countries of Europe, where they hear of, that Quakers here handle men as they handle their cattle. And for that reason, some have no mind or inclination to come hither. And who shall maintain this your cause, or plead for it? Truly we cannot do so, except you shall inform us better hereof, viz, that Christians have liberty to practice these things.

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 from their wives and children. Being now this is not done in the manner we would be done at therefore we contradict and are against this traffic of men-body.

And we who profess that it is not lawful to steal, must, likewise, avoid purchasing such things as are stolen, but rather help to stop this robbing and stealing if possible. And such men ought to be delivered out of the hands of you robbers and set free as well as in Europe. Then is Pennsylvania to have a good report, instead it hath now a bad one for this sake in other countries. Especially whereas Europeans are desirous to know in what manner Quakers do rule in their province. Most of them do look upon us with an envious eye. But if this is done well, what shall we say is done evil?

If once these slaves (which they say are so wicked and stubborn men) should join themselves—fight for their freedom—and handle their masters and mastrisses as they did handle them before; will these masters and mastrisses take the sword at hand and war against these poor slaves? Or have these not as much right to fight for their freedom, as you have to keep them slaves?

Now consider well this thing, if it is good or bad? And in case you find it to be good to handle these blacks at that manner, we desire you hereby lovingly inform us herein, which at this time never was done, that Christians have such a liberty to do so. To the end we shall be satisfied in this point and satisfied likewise our good friends and acquaintances in our native country, to whose it is a terror, that men should be handled so in Pennsylvania.

This is from our meeting at Germantown, held ye 18 of the 2 month, 1688, to be delivered to the Monthly Meeting at Richard Worrel's.

Garret Henderich

Derick up de graeff

Francis Daniell Rastorius

Abraham up Den graef