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Partakers of Other Men's Sins:
Quaker Radicalism and the Free Produce Movement

"Yet I do not regard this as an evil resting upon any particular part of the country, but 'we are all verily guilty concerning our brother'; the manufacturers of the north, the consumers of the various commodities of southern productions, are implicated in this matter, and while the sweets of this system are found upon our tables we are partakers of other men's sins."[1]

-Lucretia Mott, 1843

Throughout the Abolition Movement in the Colonies and eventual United States, the Quakers are front and center as ardent, sometimes radical opponents of slavery. No effort better illustrates Quaker zeal than the free produce movement. In studying the Abolition Movement and the Quaker involvement, this movement is discussed in little detail by even the most comprehensive of published works. The free produce movement, chiefly a Quaker phenomenon, is worth further inquiry. The movement illustrates a dedicated faction who sought to make slavery unsustainable on both moral and economic grounds. The free produce movement as an organized effort was relatively short-lived but its impacts were significant not only on the followers of the day but on the social activists and consumer advocacy campaigns that would follow. The first society dedicated solely to the cause began in 1826 during the latter part of the Abolition Movement and as a cause free produce would exist in some capacity through the end of the Civil War.[2] The efforts of the Quakers to increase abolition awareness and opposition to the institution of slavery in the United States through the free produce movement ultimately failed due to the combination of their inability

to present a united front, their own separatist sentiments, and the high costs of free labor goods. Even support of many of the most prominent abolition leaders could not overcome these obstacles.

Abolition as a fundamental tenet was not always central to what it meant to be Quaker in antebellum America. It was not until the mid-eighteenth century that antislavery rhetoric and abolitionism became central to the identity of the Society of Friends. Prior to 1754—the year of two seminal Quaker anti-slavery works—antislavery concerns and abolition sentiments were most often expressed and published by individuals, representing solely their own interpretations. These opinions were not an official position, edict, or doctrine within the Society of Friends and did not represent a unitary opinion regarding slavery by the Quakers. Many early Quakers who settled in the Americas owned slaves themselves and initially saw little wrong with the practice.[3] Reservations though, about the moral and ideological contradiction of slavery existed from the very beginning of the Quaker tradition and manifested throughout the period prior to 1754. In particular, it was the enslavement and treatment of Africans in the New World that troubled even many early Quakers.

George Fox, Englishman and founder of the Religious Society of Friends, first wrote of these concerns in 1657 in his letter "To Friends Beyond Sea, that Have Blacks and Indian Slaves." Upon visiting the island of Barbados and seeing firsthand the experiences of slaves, he became further

engaged in his opposition to slavery in the Americas.[4] Fox was not always forthright or absolute in his denunciations of slavery however. His approach and reasoning focused rather on his understandings of humanity and Christian brotherhood. Focusing on the teaching that God had created all men in equality, Fox urged fellow Friends to treat slaves as fellow Christians rather than chattel. Though he did not go so far as to call for the complete dismantling of slavery as its institution, Fox certainly was an early contributor to that conversation. As its founder, George Fox and his antislavery sentiments inserted the question of slavery into the Quaker consciousness from the beginning. In the remaining decades of the 17th century following Fox's visit to Barbados, significant numbers of Quakers moved from England to the colonies. By 1700 every American colony had congregations of Friends present.[5] It would be these Quaker colonists that would contribute heavily to the earliest conversations about the evils of slavery in the New World.

Following George Fox in England, several early Quaker colonists in America espoused their opposition to the institution of slavery in the first half of the seventeenth century. Some of the earliest individuals in the colonies to question the Society of Friends' implication in slavery were William Southeby and John Farmer. Both men, in response to their attempts to bring slavery to head at their Yearly Meetings, met great resistance amongst the conservative Quakers. As a result of this backlash by the

conservative leaders within the Society, the conversation about slavery quieted for some time afterwards.[6] Interestingly, at about the same time as the Southeby and Farmer controversies, another Quaker published a written work that also criticized the institution of slavery and called for Quaker abstention. In 1715, John Hepburn published *The American Defense of the Christian Golden Rule*, yet went largely unnoticed and unaddressed by the same constituents that were so quick to reprimand Southeby and Farmer for addressing slavery in the Yearly Meetings.[7] It would take more than a decade for a similarly controversial work to be published and the slavery conversation reopened.

In 1729, a Quaker shop owner by the name of Ralph Sandiford published his book *A Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times*, as an expression of his outrage that slavery could exist even in such a city as Philadelphia.[8] Similarly to Southeby and Farmer, Sandiford's outspoken opposition to slavery was not well received by the conservative Friends of the day. His assailment of the Quakers and their contributions to the practice of slavery was understandably controversial. In his book, Sandiford criticized Quaker ministers and leaders who "oversee, or discipline the church" yet "have not ruled for God in their own houses."[9] Though the Quaker community as a whole was not ready to embrace abolitionism, Sandiford's work pushed the movement forward and continued to build on the mounting foundation for those who would follow.

One of the most controversial and outspoken of the early antislavery Quakers was also one of the earliest known practitioners of the free produce ideal. Benjamin Lay, a merchant from Philadelphia who arrived in 1731, refused to eat the produce of slave labor even in the homes of others.[10] His radical views alone would have set Benjamin Lay apart from many his fellow Quakers. It was Lay's zealousness and ardent commitment to his ideals that would truly cement his position as Quaker radical and outcast.

Figure 1: Benjamin Lay, prominent Quaker abolitionist and early advocate of free produce. **Source:** *Quakers & Slavery Project*, The Quaker Collections at Haverford and Swathmore Colleges.

Lay often directed his antislavery attacks at Quaker leaders and ministers, just as close friend Ralph Sandiford did. In his 1737 book Benjamin Franklin published, Lay went so far as to say, "I know no worse or greater stumbling Blocks the Devil has to lay in the way of honest Inquirers, than our Ministers and Elders keeping Slaves."[11] Writing six years after his arrival in Philadelphia—in the same book in which he attacked the Quaker

clergy—Lay explained his abstention from slave-produced goods as central to Quaker belief and practice, in line with such practices as conscientious objection to wars and refusal to pay taxes by the Quakers,

> I pray & beseech you, dear Friends, by the tender mercies of our God, to consider, can be greater hypocrisy, and plainer contradiction, than for us as a people, to refuse to bear arms, or to pay them that do, and yet purchase the Plunder, the captives, for Slaves at a very great Price, thereby justifying their selling of them, & the war, by which they were or are obtained; nor doth this satisfy, but their children also are kept in Slavery.[12]

Unfortunately for Lay, his terse words in *All Slave-Holders* would lead to his denouncement and disownment by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1737.[13] At the early stages of both the abolition movement and the free produce movement in the Society of Friends, the earliest advocates faced tremendous resistance and often risked a great deal in espousing their views. It would take a far more harmonious figure to move antislavery and abolitionist principles to the forefront of Quaker believes and practices.

In 1754 two significant documents regarding slavery and Quakerism were published: John Woolman's *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* and an epistle by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Woolman's work and the epistle serve as exemplars of the changing dynamic between Quaker beliefs and the institution of slavery. These documents are not the origins of Quaker abolitionism but a culmination of work by earlier Quakers like Southeby and Sandiford. 1754 did however mark a transition from the role of antislavery sentiment in the Society of Friends as a largely individual

endeavor to one of ideological and doctrinal centrality. Some Quakers were still in possession of slaves in 1754 as most Quaker Yearly Meetings had little or no written doctrine yet in regards to the possession of slaves.[14] The works provided a catalyst for moving the entirety of the Religious Society of Friends towards abolition and for many towards an abstention of slave-produced goods.

According to Drake, John Woolman was perhaps the greatest Quaker of the eighteenth century. It was Woolman who was able to accomplish what his antislavery predecessors could not and acquire a broad acceptance of his antislavery and abolitionist views. His success due in large part to his ability to use love and kindness as means of persuasion rather than rancor and vigor as Lay and others had done. Additionally, there was an "antislavery feeling now in the air" that allowed for his message to be better received.[15] A gradual growth of consciousness amongst the Quakers regarding the treatment of slaves and the morality of slavery occurred since the time of Sandiford, allowing for Woolman and his antislavery message to resonate more deeply and fall upon more receptive hearts and minds. In his famous 1754 essay Woolman writes of his newfound "duty, through divine aid, to offer some thoughts thereon to the consideration of others."[16] What marks Woolman's approach as different than that of Sandiford was his tone. It was not one of criticism and malice but rather one filled with reflection and kindness.

In the same year as Woolman's essay an entire body, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, officially adopted an epistle with a particularly firm stance against slavery. From this date forward Yearly Meetings throughout the colonies began issuing similar statements regarding slavery. Within the epistle, the concept of the Christian "golden rule" is cited as proof that slavery was indeed wrong and incongruous with Quaker beliefs,

> Yet, as we have with Sorrow to observe, that their Number is of late increased amongst us, we have thought Proper to make our Advice and Judgment more public, that none may plead Ignorance of our Principles therein; and also, again, earnestly exhort all to avoid, in any manner encouraging that Practice of making Slaves of our Fellow Creatures. Now dear Friends, if we continually bear in Mind the royal Law, or doing to others, as we would be done by, we shall never think of bereaving our Fellow Creatures of that valuable Blessing Liberty; nor endure to grow rich by their Bondage.[17]

These seminal works would go a long way in centralizing the abolitionist cause to broader Quaker beliefs and practices. As such, the Society of Friends was thrust into a leader role in opposition of slavery and eventually in the free produce movement.

Woolman and others effectively argued the immorality of slavery as an act and institution. The early advocates of the free produce movement set out to expand culpability and assert that those who knowingly engaged in the commerce of slave-produced goods were also engaging in immoral and un-Christian acts. A full century before any organized free produce effort, Benjamin Lay was certainly radical in his ideas about abstention from slave-produced goods. In associating market involvement and the economics of

slavery into abolitionism and moral responsibility, Lay was providing the foundation of the free produce movement. Benjamin Lay, as a radical and outspoken opponent of slavery and its fruits, would also provide a typecast for future free produce advocates—many of which were considered equally radical in their day.

John Woolman, whose statements on slavery in 1754 were influential in moving the Quakers towards a universal abolitionist stance, was also at the forefront of espousing free produce principles, though in far more pacifist terms. In November of 1769 he wrote in his journal his belief that "the trading in or frequent use of any produce known to be raised by the labours of those who are under such lamentable oppression, hath appeared to be a subject which may yet more require the serious consideration of the humble followers of Christ."[18] It would not be for several more decades though that the idea of abstaining from slave-labor goods would gain traction in the national consciousness and within the Society of Friends.

In 1811, building on these earliest calls for the abstention of slave-labor goods, Elias Hicks published an essay *Observations on the Slavery of the African of the Africans and Their Descendants, and on the Use of the produce of Their Labor*. Hicks, a Quaker minister and longtime controversial figure amongst the Friends, was further distinguished as radical by his views on free produce.[19] Asking who was explicitly responsible for sustaining slavery as a system, Hicks answers, "the purchasers and consumers of the

produce of the slaves' labour, as the profits arising from the produce of their labours is the only stimulus or inducement for making slaves."[20] It was in this essay that the free produce movement in its later manifestations is grounded, for it was Elias Hicks that so prominently gave agency to the market forces of the Northern consumers in stemming the tide of slavery. By asserting that purchasers of slave-goods were equally if not guiltier of the horrors of slavery, Hicks gave the free produce movement its central argument and significance.

In its efforts to advance this premise of shared culpability, the free produce movement not only used rhetorical means but also pursued tangible methods of opposing slavery and the transactions of its goods. One of the earliest methods in this effort was the sale of freely produced goods at designated stores. One such store actually preceded the establishment of any organization, association, or society. In 1826, one year prior to the first organization of free produce advocates, Benjamin Lundy opened a free produce store in Baltimore, Maryland.[21] In the year following, two separate free produce organizations were created. The first of which was the Wilmington Society for the Encouragement of Free Labor in Wilmington, Delaware. Though not exclusively created for the purpose of free produce, it did feature the issue in its constitution.[22] Following this society would be a new organization dedicated principally to the advancement of the free

produce ideal. It would be founded in an unsurprising city, the abolitionist hotbed of Philadelphia.

Within months of the Wilmington society, the Free Produce Association of Pennsylvania was founded, consisting of sixty-four members.[23] Several months after the initial meeting of the Society, the organization is formally organized and a constitution is drafted on January 8, 1827.[24] The constitution established an organizational structure that included a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and a committee of correspondence. The committee would function to communicate with and seek out opportunities for the obtainment of free produce goods while also corresponding with other free produce and abolition societies throughout the nation.[25] Members of this early society saw great potential for free produce.

The attendees and members of this Society were optimistic that their cause would soon spread and become an integral part of the abolitionist movement. Writing in a letter to his parents James Mott, Quaker abolitionist and leading figure in the free produce movement, states "this concern [free produce] has spread very much in this city and neighborhood within a few years, and I believe will eventually prevail."[26] It appeared immediately following the first burst of energy around free produce at around this time that Mott's prediction would come true.

Immediately this movement would gain national attention, due in large part to the support of well-known individuals like Benjamin Lundy—

founder of the abolitionist paper *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*—who was in support of the free produce movement. At the 1827 American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race in Philadelphia, the newly formed organizations in Pennsylvania and Delaware were able to jointly represent their cause before the convention.[27] Benjamin Lundy used his sway with the convention in getting the subject of free produce even discussed. Given that the two organizations were both less than a year old at the time, this was an enormous step forward for free produce.

It would not be long for the free produce movement to take hold and expand beyond these initial groups. By the end of the decade alone, a female only 'Association for Promoting the Manufacture and Use of Free Cotton' was organized in Philadelphia and an additional four free produce stores would be opened in the region.[28] The female only organization was of particular interest, as free produce was an avenue through which nineteenth century women could have tangible influence upon the institution of slavery, as they were the primary consumers of the goods within the domestic realm. As reported an 1829 edition of *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, the female association in Philadelphia had purchased a small amount of muslin for its members to purchase; additionally, the association was in the process of procuring free labor cotton that could be "spun into yarns of different sizes, suitable for shirtings, sheetings, calicoes, stockings, etc."[29] As we will see, the

efforts of these ladies and others within the free produce movement would expand beyond cotton and textile products and into other goods such as sugar.

It is significant to note that all of these organizations, though overwhelmingly consisting of Quakers, were not Quaker-only organizations. The movement did not begin as a Quaker only initiative, though it would slowly evolve into mostly that. Ruth Nuermberger, the foremost scholar on the free produce movement, divides the three decade long movement into three distinct periods.[30] Each period marks a move towards greater and greater dominance of the movement by Quakers. Between the time of the first free produce store opening in Delaware in 1825 and the end of the Civil War, there were twenty-six free produce societies formed and more than fifty stores opened across ten states. The free produce movement stretched from Pennsylvania to Iowa, Vermont to North Carolina.[31]

Perhaps the most significant and positive reflection of the free produce movement in its earliest stages was its initial support and coverage by William Lloyd Garrison's famous antislavery newspaper *The Liberator*. In the 25 June 1831 edition, just a few years following the birth of the organized free produce movement, the paper features two articles regarding free produce. One of the articles, a reprint of an article from *Genius*, speaks highly of the Free Produce Association in Philadelphia as well organized and efficient entity.[32] This article, written by Garrison himself exhibits the early

excitement around free produce by some of the most prominent abolitionists. In the second article of this edition, *The Liberator* addresses some of the early criticism and skepticism that many had towards free produce as a movement.

Responding to the claim that the free produce movement lacks the potential to make an impact; the article responds by asking, "is it not something to the individual, to know that he has washed his hands of the guild of oppression?"[33] While still in the early stages of the movement, this article is a clear endorsement of the free produce ideal. Though it does not explicitly contend that all Quakers or all individuals should abstain from slave goods, it does commend those who do and recommend that others at the very least give consideration to it.

A year later *The Liberator* would write of the growing movement, especially in within the strongly Quaker state of Pennsylvania. An article in 1832 reported Pennsylvania to be home to four free produce societies, with a membership of more than eight hundred between the four societies.[34] Within just five years or so of the first organization dedicated solely to free produce, the movement was well on its way to becoming a significant faction in the abolition movement as a whole.

At around the same time as the free produce movement organized in Delaware and Pennsylvania, the Society of Friends at-large experienced a period of divisiveness and infighting. This internal unrest and conflict

significantly impacted the free produce movement and limited its effectiveness. One Quaker scholar, Allen C. Thomas, states that this period of conflict and eventual split "sharply divides the earlier history of Friends from the latter."[35] Prior to 1827-1828, the Quakers were more or less able to present a united front on most issues and doctrine, including slavery and the permissible ways of pursuing its abolition. Following the controversy however, the Quakers entered a period of disagreement on a multitude of issues. The free produce movement's connection to this split is significant as the key player in the Quaker conflict was none other than Elias Hicks, an early proponent of free produce.

Elias Hicks—long a prominent and polarizing figure among the Quakers and in the abolition movement—and his teachings became the catalyst for a dramatic and long-term split in the Society of Friends. Those who more or less identified with Hicks comprised what was named the Hicksite branch; those who did not accept Hicks' teachings or some semblance of them organized as the Orthodox branch. Further complicating and splintering the Society of Friends later was the Wilbur-Gurney controversy, which pertained only to the Orthodox branch.[36] It is clear that from 1827, the Society of Friends faced a new reality of conflict and dissent within their organizations that hindered many future efforts to influence and enact change and present a united front, long a characteristic of the Quakers. The free produce movement certainly suffered from the split.

Disenchanted by what he saw as an increasingly worldly and economically centered focus among the elders, Hicks sought to reestablish personal and religious liberty as central to Quaker teachings. Believing that God was present as a spirit in everyone, Hicks taught that an obedience and reverence to the spirit was sufficient for salvation as a Christian.[37] Taken to its logical conclusion in his own mind, Hicks believed that this principle freed individuals from the rigid, conservative canon of the elders in the Society and even within scriptures. Fundamental to the Hicksite branch was the belief that "in matters of doctrine there should be the fullest liberty."[38] It was through this belief of personal and religious liberty that Mott and other Quakers justified their involvement in the worldly domains of politics and social reforms. Many of the Conservative Quakers, though against slavery, had come to view reform efforts as an overly worldly effort, one that should not be taken up by devout Quakers.

By and large, the proponents of Quaker involvement in political and social movements like the free produce movement were Hicksite radicals.[39] Individuals like Lucretia Mott and Benjamin Lundy, who would serve prominent roles in the movement, were atypical of their fellow Quakers, even within the Hicksite branch. The Hicksites saw free produce and abstinence as an opportunity to regain "individual moral authority" over their lives just as Elias Hicks advocated.[40] The association of the free produce movement with the Hicksites may have ultimately limited its scope and success. Specifically,

Drake argues that Elias Hicks name alone may have turned many otherwise ardent abolitionists off to the free produce cause.[41] It was not Elias Hicks alone that limited the effectiveness of the movement and caused such great dissent to spread through the Society in this period.

By the 1840s—well after the Hicksite-Orthodox controversy—support for the free produce movement amongst the Quakers and other abolitionists was waning. The advertisements that had consistently appeared in abolitionist papers earlier in the movement were quite rare by the 1850s.[42] Garrison, who early on supported and advocated for free produce, came to see the movement as ineffective and a waste of time.[43] Though not a Quaker himself, Garrison was quite influential on abolitionists from all walks and his newspaper *The Liberator* was widely read by Quakers and non-Quakers alike. Favorable newspaper coverage initially certainly elevated free produce's standing amongst readers of *The Liberator* and Garrison's support was very important.

Abolitionists other than Garrison also found reason to be critical of the free produce movement. Among the reasons cited, many felt that individuals would be overwhelmed and paralyzed under the weight of complete abstention from all slave-goods, given how intertwined they were in the economy.[44] Many abolitionists did not agree upon even the very basic premise that slave-goods and consumers of them were implicit in the evils of slavery.[45] Without a consensus amongst Quaker abolitionists, the movement clearly

lacked a unified and powerful support it needed to make significant impacts in the fight against slavery.

Though the support of William Lloyd Garrison and his paper *The Liberator* was significant in the early stages of the movement, their support waned as the abolition movement developed and Garrison turned his focus to other means. Arguably an even more influential endorsement of the free produce movement came from James and Lucretia Mott. The Mott's, incredibly influential and dedicated Quakers, championed not only the abolitionist cause, but later the women's suffrage movement and temperance.

Figure 2: Lucretia Mott, radical abolitionist and champion of the free produce movement. **Source:** *Quakers & Slavery Project*, The Quaker Collections at Haverford and Swathmore Colleges.

James Mott owned and operated a domestic business that often bought and sold products that at times included cotton.[46] Influenced greatly by the preaching of Elias Hicks, both James and Lucretia Mott took up the free produce cause in 1825. Writing later, Lucretia spoke of her decision after leaving a particulary moving meeting she "yielded to the obligation" and

made every effort for the next several decades to abstain from "the products of slave labor."[47] Throughout her life, Mott gained the admiration of many for this zeal and dedication to her faith and moral convictions.

With the "fire of a Lay," Lucretia Mott's radical views and outspoken personality made her a lightning rod for controversy.[48] Her controversial convictions and methods did not preclude her from being widely successful in her efforts. While she was a radical in many respects, Mott was a capable and "rationalistic" reformer who embraced her role and managed to float just on the margin of Quaker and non-Quaker organizations and movements.[49] In some respects, Mott represented the antithesis of the free produce movement as she successfully engaged with a variety of constituents all the while working in accordance to her own agenda and convictions. Even with her prominent role in the movement, free produce failed to replicate many of Lucretia Mott's best attributes in their efforts to expand their cause.

Even a united front of Quaker solidarity in the free produce cause may have been insufficient in advancing the movement. The mere association of the free produce movement with the Quakers significantly limited its success. The nature of the Society of Friends is one of wariness and distrust of the "outside," secular world as well as other denominations. Though the free produce movement never consisted of only Quakers, as Faulkner notes, its leadership and strongest support always came from Quakers. Early on the free produce movement enjoyed wide support among non-Quaker

abolitionists and free African-Americans, but as time went on their attention turned elsewhere.[50] The dominance of the Society of Friends in the leadership of the movement undoubtedly shaped the course of events.

The incredible fire and dedication that many Quakers exhibited towards the free produce cause did not outweigh the damaging effects of their inherent separatist sentiments however. Early on the broad appeal of abolitionism and free produce allowed the movement and its associations to be open to all. The Pennsylvania Free Produce Association, with its open or "mixed" membership, consisted of both Quaker and non-Quaker members though its "spine" was made up of Quakers.[51] Throughout the 1830s, the free produce movement continued to operate as a more or less broadly based movement but with its leadership coming largely from prominent Quakers like James and Lucretia Mott, Benjamin Lundy, and others.

In 1838, towards the end of an era of open and diverse participation in the movement, another "mixed" organization was formed: the American Free Produce Association.[52] Also based in Philadelphia, this organization more or less replaced the Free Produce Association of Pennsylvania as the preeminent free produce organization. Though it was nominally a "mixed" society, a look at the constitution and officer listing shows that it consisted of only Quaker officers. It is evident that Nuermberger is correct in her assertion that the free produce movement "became a Quaker movement" at around this time.[53] Though the free produce movement became increasingly

exclusive around the end of the decade, the Society of Friends reemphasized separatism in the years prior.

The reinvigoration of a stricter stance on separation and withdrawal from the "excesses of the world" stemmed largely from the Hicksite-Orthodox schism of 1826-1827 and the Wilbur-Gurney schism that was in its infancy in the 1830s. As a result of these conflicts within the Society of Friends, the proper manner in which Friends were permitted to interact with the world became a salient topic. Enoch Lewis, a Conservative advocate for the free produce movement, wrote several articles in 1835 that urged his fellow Quakers to take up the cause of abolition and pursue antislavery measures but only so long as one was not associating with denominations.[54] Interestingly enough, this feeling of isolation was not unique to the conservative branch of the Society, even though traditionally it was the radicals who sought to engage more freely with non-Quakers in matters of social and moral reform. Lucretia Mott and Benjamin Lundy for instance often played both sides of the debate cautiously and with success.[55] Mott and Lundy however, incredibly gifted in their abilities to engage and relate with others, represent exceptions and cannot be taken to portray many others or the movement as a whole.

Three years after Enoch Lewis offered his thoughts on Quaker separatism the Hicksite branch in Baltimore barred members of their congregation from joining the American Anti-Slavery Society, a "mixed"

abolitionist society that many Quakers and free produce advocates belonged to.[56] Pressure throughout the Society to disassociate themselves with all organizations not exclusively Quaker caused many supporters of free produce and other abolitionists to withdraw from mixed societies.[57] It was around this time that the movement experienced yet another shift in the leadership structure. The free produce cause had lost significant followership amongst many non-Quakers and was almost exclusively Quaker by 1844.[58] With such a narrow pool of supporters to draw from, the free produce movement moved more and more towards insignificance and marginality.

The American Free Produce Association folded in 1845 as a result of the mass exodus of Quaker members who made up the core of its body. In its place arose the Philadelphia Free Produce Association of Friends, a Quaker only organization as outlined in its constitution. This shifted the movement ever more towards the Quakers and significantly limited opportunity for growth and involvement outside of the Society. Though the free produce movement was making some gains among fellow Friends after this move towards separatist policies, outside of the Society there was very little interest and attempts by the Quakers to engage other groups in the cause are not evident.

Not all free produce supporters took comfort in the new direction of the movement. Writing in *The Liberator* in 1847 Lea W. Gause notes the movements shift towards an almost entirely Quaker endeavor and saw this

as quite unfortunate. She relates this development to the abstinence campaign in the British Isles of West Indies sugar. Gause asks what affect it may have had if that reform effort had been limited to only Quakers. It is her assumption, rightfully so, that its success would be greatly diminished and that the American free produce effort should take note of that and implement a similarly inclusive approach.[59] Gause's warnings do not appear to be widely acknowledged by many others and free produce continued on a trajectory of Quaker separatism and obscurity.

Central to the concept of free produce as a movement is its role as more than just a boycott. The free produce movement expanded on previous calls for abstention of slave-produced labor by the likes of Woolman and Lay. The Quakers of the free produce movement made the procurement of an alternative option—free labor goods—equally or more important than the abstention of slave-produced goods. The first circular of the Free Produce Association of Friends said as much in 1845 when they informed their fellow Friends that "total abandonment" of their preferred consumer goods "is not necessary, for they may be produced by the labours of freemen."[60] From its inception, free produce sought to move beyond just the abstention of slave-goods as many rightfully saw this as an unreasonable request for northern consumers of the time. Glickman more accurately describes the free produce movement as a "buycott" rather than a boycott.[61] By creating consumer options and giving agency to those consumers, the free produce movement

moved the ideals of earlier abstainers into more practical terms that they hoped would enjoy broad appeal.

The free produce movement was as much a business operation as it was a social movement or moral ideal. It terms of its failures, the business portion of the movement suffered equally if not more than the ideological efforts. Free produce stores often endured short operating lives, though the stores of Lydia White, James Mott, and Benjamin Lundy enjoyed great success by contrast to most of their contemporaries. The greatest challenge for those seeking to operate a free produce store lay in locating and obtaining goods that fit the free-produce criteria.[62] Yet it would turn out that the free produce movement faced stiff challenges on both the supply *and* demand side of the free-labor goods market.

Success and optimism surrounding the collection and sale of free produce goods though high in the earliest stages of the movement experienced ebbs and flows throughout its existence. Most of the excitement that can be discerned from the reports and writings of the day must be tempered by the understanding that the authors of such writings were personally involved and tied to the movement and understandably so would have been the most optimistic of the potential for free produce goods in the market. Consistent throughout the movement however was the patchwork nature of the free produce supply chain.

Given that free labor and free produce agricultural products of any kind were few and far between in the first half of the nineteenth century in the United States, those in the north who sought to find such goods explored every avenue. Throughout their existence, organizations like the Free Produce Association of Pennsylvania, the American Free Produce Association, and the Philadelphia Free Produce Association of Friends worked tirelessly throughout the Americas to procure a variety of goods for the numerous stores that operated in the North. In North Carolina, a handful of Quaker and non-Quaker farmers often provided cotton and rice to the movement.[63] States like Texas, Mississippi, and Tennessee also provided free labor cotton, while Ohio, Kentucky, and Canada provided a supply of tobacco to satisfy the men's habits.[64] Puerto Rico, South America, and the West Indies provided a source of free labor sugar and molasses for some while other supporters used maple sugar as a substitute.[65] After the British Emancipation in 1833 many in the free produce movement hoped that the newly freed workforce in the West Indies would provide ample free produce goods, particularly food products. Unfortunately, due to high tariffs on imported goods this failed to materialize as a viable option.[66] As a result, the movement once again looked inward for the procurement of free labor products.

Aside from the troubles in supply, demand also presented an ongoing challenge for the free produce movement. Many factors contributed to this

shortfall in demand. Quite simply, the higher prices of free produce goods often made it difficult to sell. Market economics informs us that in a scenario of limited supply, as outlined above, price will undoubtedly be elevated. Products like muslin and calicoes, available through free produce stores in places like Philadelphia and New York, often were priced well above the market value, due in large part to the high costs of the raw cotton itself.[67] Aside from the disparities in price, free produce goods often faced deficiencies in other characteristics. Food goods also suffered, as George W. Taylor points out when he spoke of sugar with a "disagreeable taste and odor" and rice that was "very poor, dark and dirty."[68]

Consumer taste and preferences caused significant troubles for the free produce, even in times when price was a non-factor. The patterned prints, calicoes, and other garments available to potential customers lacked the stylistic qualities and comfort they had grown accustomed to.[69] Inferior products at a higher cost were a hard sell for even the most ardent free produce supporters. No level of guilt or moral obligation could overcome such factors of style and comfort for many abolitionists. For many women and men alike, this loss of comfort and style was more than they were willing to sacrifice.[70] Even when prices were competitive or sometimes lower, as in the 1840s, demand was still low.[71] The free produce movement consistently faced these obstacles in price, quality, and consumer preferences. Combined with

the aforementioned troubles in the procurement of the goods and within the Society of Friends, free produce as a movement struggled.

The free produce movement failed in its intentions to end the institution of slavery through the abstention of slave-labor goods. It was not a significant factor in the overall abolitionist cause and it failed to draw a large following both within the Quakers and outside. The internal conflict and schism within the Quakers served as a significant barrier to a full embrace of the movement. Additionally, a failure on the part of the Quakers to overcome their own separatist sentiments coupled with the high costs and limited availability of free labor goods did not allow for the free produce movement to gain traction within the large abolition movement.

Given the failures and ineffectiveness of the free produce movement to create lasting change, it would be easy for one to discount its relevance to the historical record. Yet the free produce movement is vital to any understanding of the abolition movement in its full complexity. With such prominent figures as Lucretia Mott, Elias Hicks, and Benjamin Lundy so central to the narrative of the movement, free produce was an important principle for abolitionists. Where the movement was successful was in its expansion of culpability and implication that all Americans—Northerners and Southerners alike—shared responsibility simply due to their involvement in the economy. This broadening of moral obligation to include personal acts in the economy has outlived its Quaker origins and the free

produce movement. Similar arguments are made today by innumerable consumer activists and fair trade advocates in regards to equitable practices in the global economy of the 21st century. This is the legacy of the free produce movement and sheds light on the importance of its study.

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[2] Ruth Ketring Nuermberger, *The Free Produce Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1942), 117.

[3] Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), 4.

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[5] Allen C. Thomas, *A History of Friends in America* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1905), 98-99.

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[9] Ralph Sandiford, *A Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times* (Philadelphia, 1729). Quoted in Drake, 38.

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