

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

[MODIFIED]

These are the reasons why we are against the traffic of men-body,¹ as follows. Is there anyone that would like to be handled at this manner? To be sold or made a slave for all the time of his life? We have feared seeing Turkish ships at sea, that we might be sold as slaves in Turkey. Now, are we any better than the Turks? No, rather it is worse for those who say they are Christians; for we hear that the most part of such negroes are brought hither against their will and consent, and that many of them are stolen.

Now, though they are black, we can not conceive it is any better to have them slaves than it is to have other white ones. There is a saying that we shall do to all men as we would like done to ourselves; making no difference of what generation, descent or colour they are. And those who steal or rob men, and those who buy or purchase them, are they not all alike?

In Europe there are many oppressed for their beliefs; and here there are those oppressed which are of a black colour. And we who say that men must not commit adultery, some do commit adultery by separating wives from their husbands and giving them to others; and some sell the children of these poor creatures to other men. Ah! Those who do such a thing must consider: what if you would be treated in this manner? And if it is done according to Christianity? You surpass the evils of Holland and Germany in this practice.

We hear some say 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 that 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 is is not



¹ Slavery

lawful to steal, must, likewise, avoid to purchase such things as are stolen, but rather help to stop this robbing and stealing if possible.

If once these slaves (as they are called by wicked and stubborn men) should join together and fight for their freedom, would those masters take the sword at hand and war against these poor slaves? Or have these negroes not as much right to fight for their freedom as you have to keep them slaves?

Now consider this thing, is it good or bad? And in case you find it to be good to handle these blacks at that manner, we desire and require you hereby lovingly, that you may respond to the points above. To the end we shall be satisfied in this point, and satisfy likewise our good friends and acquaintances in our native country, to whose it is a terror, or fearful thing, that men should be handled so in Pennsylvania.

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

SOURCE: *The first anti-slavery petition written by a religious group in US History. Written by four Quakers in Germantown Pennsylvania in 1688. The petition was presented at later meetings, but no legislative action was taken in response. Pennsylvania became the second state to abolish slavery in 1780.*

Post Reading Questions

Discuss and respond in table groups. Complete and submit ONE set of responses for your group.

1. What is the saying (sometimes called “the golden rule”) mentioned in paragraph 2 that guides the authors’ opinion on slavery?
2. In paragraph 3, what do the authors say about the difference between oppression in Europe and in America?
3. How might the Quakers’ experience in Europe inform their stance on slavery?
4. How did the beliefs of the Quakers in the Middle Colonies differ from those of the Puritans of New England?