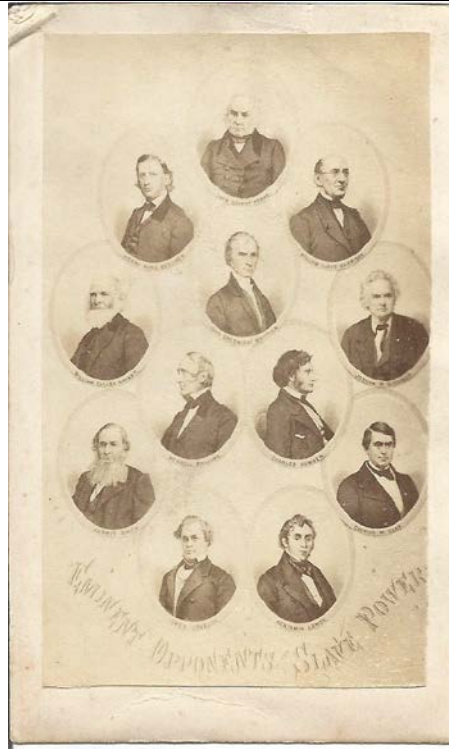


Chapter 72 -- Early White Voices Speaking Out Against Slavery



Dates:
1688-1820

- Sections:**
- Early White Opposition To Slavery In The North
 - Early Opposition In The South
 - Benjamin Lundy Advances The Call For Emancipation
 - Lucretia Mott Also Joins The Anti-Slavery Cause

Time: 1688 To The 1820's

Early White Opposition To Slavery In The North

In 1688, the "Germantown Quaker Petition Against Slavery" protests the practice as a violation of the Bible's "Golden Rule." John Woolman, a New Jersey Quaker, follows with his anti-slavery pamphlet and reform tours in 1743. The Boston minister, Jonathan Mayhew, sets the stage in 1747 for what will become the crusade against slavery by the Unitarian Church.

Others join in during the late colonial era. The scientist, Dr. Benjamin Rush, argues in 1773 that blacks are not inherently inferior to whites on intellectual capacity. In 1774 the Methodist John Wesley decries slavery as inhumane, and delivers this message broadly through his missionary work.

Ben Franklin founds his "Pennsylvania Society For The Relief Of Negroes Unlawfully Held In Bondage" in 1775.

At the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, founders like Gouverneur Morris and Luther Martin rail against the practice and do their best to encourage an immediate end to it – while John Jay joins Franklin and Rush in 1785 in starting up the New York Manumission Society.

While some of this moral opposition has an effect on public opinions, the actual decline of slavery in the North traces mainly to its dwindling importance to the economy.

Once the slave ships of Rhode Island can no longer find a ready supply of Africans for transport along the de-populated western ports, the “triangular trade” becomes unprofitable. And, in 1807, the Constitution ban on importing slaves goes into effect, a move which finally hands “the market” over to “domestic breeders” in states like Virginia.

By 1820, sympathy for the plight of the Africans is in short supply among whites from Maine to Illinois. The practice of slavery has withered away in the North, with only 18,000 remaining in bondage at the time. They are joined by another 117,000 “freed men” spread across the entire region – living in segregated areas, carefully regulated by “black codes,” and generally regarded as an unwonted nuisance, to be “cleansed” from residency wherever possible.

By this time, many Northerners are also eager to blame the South for perpetuating slavery in America. The result being the presence of more, rather than fewer, blacks spread across the land, adding to concerns about safety, and diminishing both the value and perceived “dignity” of white labor. Anger follows on, in epithets calling out the South as the “Slave Power” or the “Slavocracy.”

But it will be another decade before public opposition to slavery itself gains momentum in the North. Some of this will be driven by the Second Great Awakening and crusading Abolitionists, hoping to wipe away the moral stains of human bondage. Most will trace to “lower order” regional antagonisms related to money and power.

Time: 1774-1818

Early Opposition In The South

As in the North, a scattering of efforts are made by Southern churches to welcome blacks into their congregations. Notable reach-outs include the First Baptist Church of Petersburg, Va, which opens its doors in 1774 to a black congregation and ministers – to be followed in 1777 by the First African Baptist Church of Savannah, founded by a former slave, and in 1801 by the First Baptist Church of Columbia, SC.

At first some church’s missionaries also call for the end of slavery and equality of all men, while encouraging blacks to become both members and preachers. But this aggressive stance becomes muted over time, as the various sects try to extend their membership with Southern whites, many of whom are slave owners.

One remarkable exception is George Bourne, a Presbyterian minister in Virginia, who begins a life-long abolitionist crusade in 1818 by issuing his screed, *The Book And Slavery Irreconcilable*, in which he declares that the Bible cites “man-stealing” as a sin.

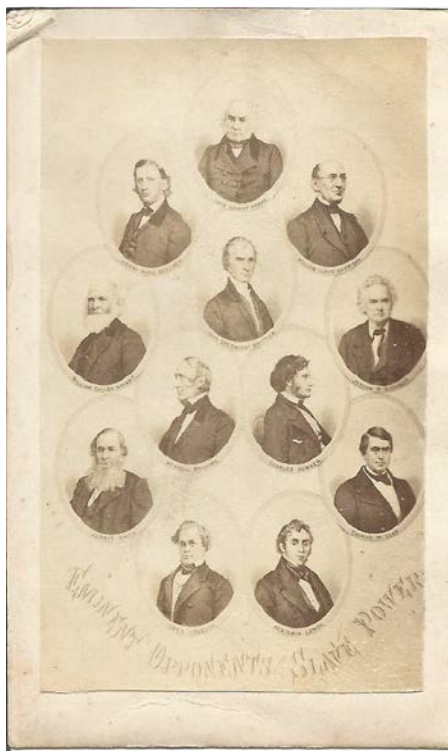
Like all early abolitionists, Bourne is met by a firestorm of public resistance, and is cast off from the ministry, first by his local congregation and then by the General Assembly. Still he lives on until 1845, becoming a newspaper editor in New York city and a leading national voice for immediate abolition. His nominal heirs in this regard will include the martyred editor, Elijah Lovejoy, and his friends, Lloyd Garrison and Lewis Tappan.

By 1820, however, serious opposition to slavery in the South has all but vanished – based on the region’s singular dependence on the institution to maintain its economic well-being.

Instead of the diverse economy materializing in the North, the South has become wholly dependent on domestically “bred” slaves, a base contingent to toil in its cotton fields and an excess inventory to be sold off like cattle to new plantations opening in the west.

Time: 1815-1839

Benjamin Lundy Advances The Call For Emancipation



Leading the early resurgence of moral opposition to slavery in the North will be another Quaker, Benjamin Lundy.

Lundy is born in 1789 and raised on a farm in New Jersey. At 19 years he moves to Wheeling, in western Virginia, in order to apprentice as a saddler. While learning the craft, he is exposed to, and horrified by, the slave trade that is active in the town. Like many other converts to abolition, he is particularly bothered by the sight of chained “coffles” of slaves in pens, awaiting shipment south. He later reflects on this experience:

It grieved my heart, and the iron (to oppose it) entered my soul.

Lundy’s saddling business leads to economic success, and, in 1815, he moves west to Mt. Pleasant, Ohio, where he sets up shop, marries, begin a family and commences on a quiet and prosperous life.

His Quaker conscience, however, convinces him that his purpose in life lies in a personal crusade against the evils of slavery he witnessed years ago. So he sells his business and sets out on his mission.

“Eminent Opponents of the Slave Power,”
Including Ben Lundy (lower right)

He is especially influenced in this regard by another Quaker, Elias Hicks.

Hicks is a New Yorker, born in 1748, who becomes a carpenter and farmer by trade. He joins the Assembly of Friends at age 21 and is quickly recognized by his congregation for the spiritual insights he voices during prayer meetings. As such he is chosen as a “recording minister,” and becomes an itinerant preacher.

From the beginning he converts his beliefs into action. He frees his family slaves in 1778, sets up a Charity Society for Africans in 1794, and by 1811 advocates an economic boycott of all goods –

especially cotton and sugar – produced by slaves. By his words and deeds, Hicks influences not only Ben Lundy but also Lucretia Mott.

In 1815, with help from other Friends, Lundy founds The Union Humane Society – the first such group in his time to publicly speak up on behalf of emancipation.

He begins to tour the countryside and deliver public lectures attacking the evils of slavery. He also writes articles for a Friend’s newspaper, and, when the owner dies in 1821, he becomes the hands-on publisher. He names the paper, *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*.

Over the next eighteen years, Benjamin Lundy will devote all of his resources and strength to eradicating slavery in America, and enlisting important new converts in his cause.

In 1825 he escorts freed slaves to Haiti, then returns home to learn that his wife has died and his five children have been placed in a foster home. He decides to leave them there, and free himself totally to carry on his quest, earning this tribute from the poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, on his death in 1839:

It was“(Lundy’s) lot to struggle, for years almost alone, a solitary voice crying in the wilderness, and, amidst all, faithful to his one great purpose, the emancipation of the slaves.

Time: 1821-1880

Lucretia Mott Also Joins The Anti-Slavery Cause



Lucretia Mott (1793-1880)

Another early Quaker convert is Lucretia Mott.

She is born Lucretia Coffin in 1793 in Nantucket, Massachusetts. At age thirteen her parents send her off to Nine Partners Quaker Boarding School, where she is educated and where she begins her career as a teacher, alongside her future husband, James Mott.

She marries, becomes a teacher, then a biblical scholar and finally a lay minister in 1821, at the age of 28 years.

Like her counterparts, she rebels against the rote traditions of her church and calls for:

Practical godliness over ceremonial religion.

The search for “truth,” according to Mott, begins by looking inside oneself and connecting with the potential perfection, “the inner light,” that lies within.

Then comes action. The duty of the awakened is to go forth and reform the world’s ills – something she will pursue all the way to her death in 1880.

By 1815, Mott, along with Lundy, will influence the Quaker General Assembly to speak out on behalf of abolition, declaring that the practice of buying and selling slaves is “inconsistent with the Gospels.”

The two will also have a profound effect on William Lloyd Garrison, the eventual leader of those whites who literally risk their lives on behalf of freeing the slaves and assimilating them into everyday society.

Lundy will always be remembered for one of his final acts, in 1829, when he strikes up a conversation in Boston with a 23 year named Garrison – an iron-willed Baptist and neophyte reformer -- whom Lundy encourages to join the anti-slavery crusade. “Mother Mott” will later take Garrison under her wing as his chief spiritual advisor.