

Fit for Freedom but not for Friendship?:
Introductory Exploration of Quaker Education, African-American Opportunity, & HBCUs
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The title of this talk is inspired by the title of Vanessa Julye and Donna McDaniel's 2009 publication, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice*. Their work and other recent scholarship and initiatives occurring within the Society of Friends and in Quaker-founded institutions engaging in anti-racism and racial justice work highlight a need to reevaluate and complicate traditional historical memory and the dominant Quaker identity of exceptionalism when it comes to racial justice. Obviously, this a huge task beyond the scope of a brief conference presentation. Today I will focus specifically on Quaker higher education using Guilford College as a case study.

New Garden Boarding School, now Guilford College, was founded as an exclusively white, consciously anti-slavery educational institution in the 1830s and remains the only Quaker-founded college in the southeastern United States. This legacy is complex and presents examples of pride as well as of missed opportunities and enforcement of the status quo. Often the heritage of resisting slavery has muted or overshadowed narratives about Guilford's complicity with racial segregation and other forms of racial oppression. Today the institution touts the campus land as a place that provided refuge to enslaved African Americans in the early nineteenth century and, 56 years after enrollment of Guilford's first full-time African American student, has a 25% African American student population. More research is needed to assess the campus climate between what current research documents as a radical abolitionist founding and the present day articulation of values prioritizing equity and inclusion.

BEGINNINGS AS NEW GARDEN

The Society of Friends (Quakers) are held up as early leaders of opposition to slavery and were notable in their relatively early condemnation of the institution of slavery and prohibitions on their members profiting from or participating in enslavement. Quakers were (and are within the United States) an overwhelmingly white denomination. Some early Friends in the 17th and 18th centuries, both in the north and the south, actively participated as enslavers and were instructed to do humanely -- an instruction at odds with the very concept of slavery. Quaker anti-slavery and abolitionists voices were present throughout and these individuals are viewed as some of the earliest leaders and influencers in British and American reform movements. By the 1770s, Quakers revised their faith and practice to explicitly banned their members from participating in and profiting from the institution slavery. Notably, there was no sectional divide on this decision. North Carolina Friends were as committed to anti-slavery as their northern coreligionists even

with the additional challenges this posed for those living in a region where the economic influences and entrenchment of slavery were increasing rather than decreasing.

By the early 1800s, many Southern Friends were relocating westward to live in states without slavery and to have access to new land and opportunities. There was legitimate concerns that no Quakers would be left in the South as numbers dramatically shrank. North Carolina Quakers saw a need to provide educational opportunities through an institution that would be in line with their values. The school was founded to provide a “guarded education.” Basic guidelines and expectations considered part of a guarded education, such as plainness in dress and speech, were strictly enforced to protect and encourage dedication to the Quaker faith. Early school personnel actively practiced their commitment to abolitionism through direct involvement in anti-slavery activities and encouraging use of “free produce” (i.e. purchasing goods not produced through slave labor).

While not all North Carolina Quakers were abolitionists (as opposed to simply being against slavery), recent research shows that the early New Garden Board School provided radical educational opportunities at odds with the dominant culture. Much of what we know of the first two years come from candid observations in letters by teacher Harriet Peck. Peck came to North Carolina from Rhode Island to serve as one of the teachers. In addition to her teaching at New Garden Boarding School, Harriet also mentions teaching on Sundays at “the school house where the colored school is held.” Harriet’s letters identify key Friends as “good abolitionists” which helps us to identify the North Carolina Quaker Garrisonian immediatists. Included were boarding school superintendents Dougan and Aseneth Clark and boarding school trustee Phineas Nixon. Time does not allow for me to quote in detail from Harriet’s rich letters but a few snippets provide some sense of them:

April 1838: “The scholars ... have had the subject of Emancipation before their debating society several evenings. ... “Ought immediate emancipation to take place” A number of weeks since, they discussed the same question, and decided in the negative. Last week they took it up again, and after having discussed it two evenings, gave the vote and it was decided in favor of Immediate Emancipation, by a large majority.”

September 1838: “I read Garrison’s first of August Address with great interest and after a hasty perusal of the remaining contents..handed it to cousin Dougan.... Cousin Aseneth made a proposition to the scholars a few evenings since that they draw up a petition... respecting the obtaining of the produce of free labor...”

The first years of New Garden Boarding School were a beacon of hope in a very challenging time and place. However, there were harsher realities to contend with and things were not going to get easier – for the boarding school or for the fight against slavery. North Carolina Friends were not as wealthy as some of their northern counterparts and most could not afford the tuition or establish sufficient scholarship aid to send as many young Friends to New Garden as hoped. The school began welcoming white non-Quakers, first with a surcharge for non-Friends and

later with a discount to Quaker students. By the 1850s, New Garden Boarding School still had a large number of Quaker students but non-Quakers were in the majority.

Thus far, I have not identified correspondence or other sources as candid as Peck to provide insights for the period from 1840 and 1860. If not for the letters of Harriet Peck, one might assume Quaker support of African American education ended when Levi Coffin left for Indiana in the 1820s and did not return until the 1860s when northern Friends funded education initiatives following the Civil War. The only clues of engagement in what is known today as the Underground Railroad are though murky anecdotes and stories written decades after the fact. There were some exceptional Friends who took extra-legal steps in continuing support of African American and abolitionist work, while others stayed well within the law and focused on surviving challenging economic times with pursuit of endeavors that did not involve direct participation in slavery.

RECONSTRUCTION

New Garden Boarding School was founded explicitly for Quakers but, primarily due to economic necessity, expanded to include other whites within the first decade. Members of the local free black community were only included as staff members. Restriction to white is understandable when a majority of the area's black population remained enslaved and laws prohibited providing education to them. However, the unspoken understanding of racial segregation remained following the Civil War.

Friends worked to rebuild their schools throughout the state and work was also done by Friends to established schools for African Americans. This was done with generous support from Quakers outside of North Carolina, with projects to establish schools for African Americans coming from northern Quaker organizations. A few North Carolina Quakers participated as teachers in African American schools, both immediately after the war and later. For example, former New Garden Boarding School faculty member John W. Woody was a founding teacher and administrator at Slater Academy, now Winston-Salem State University. However, primary efforts by North Carolina Friends focused on educational opportunities for their own members (of whom there were none of color at this time) and any European Americans in the local area. Efforts to educate African Americans were separate endeavors and illustrated the "separate but equal" policy which would be followed by North Carolina Friends and the soon-to-be Guilford College for another century.

BECOMING GUILFORD

While the impetus of New Garden Boarding School's founding was placed on the "guarded education" needed to provide Quaker young people with learning opportunities at odds with the dominant culture, the transformation to Guilford College held less exclusively Quaker motivations and was not viewed at odds with their non-Quaker neighbors. In addition to collaboration with Quaker schools, faculty and students now looked to North Carolina's white

institutions and a number of New Garden and Guilford graduates became faculty members at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and the state's college for women in Greensboro (now UNCG).

In his 2007 essay, "The Search for the Quaker College," historian Tom Hamm observed that Quaker colleges became much less distinctive after 1865. He specifically notes their non-distinctive approach to racial equality. While Quakers are notable as early opponents of slavery and articulation of racial equality, he writes that this commitment was not demonstrated at the Quaker colleges. He writes:

Haverford did not admit a black student until the 1920s, Swarthmore until the 1940s, and Wilmington until the 1950s. Guilford deferred to local segregationist mores until the 1960s. Even colleges like Earlham, which admitted its first black student in the 1880s, often reflected the prevalent racism of the larger society in other ways.

Campus culture in the twentieth century very much reflected the surrounding European American attitudes and practices of the era. This included many activities that were at the least insensitive and often overtly racist. Minstrel shows were performed on campus as a popular entertainment through the 1950s. Official college decisions repeatedly denied overnight hospitality to people of color participating in conferences at the colleges until the 1960s. Simultaneously, Guilford promoted itself as having an international atmosphere and highlighted the presence of foreign students from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East but continued to exclude local African Americans as well as those from a growing Quaker presence in Africa.

PATTERNS OF POWER AND INFLUENCE

At each phase of Guilford's evolution, it is informative to consider multiple layers of institutional identity and experience. For the purposes of this presentation, examples from the mid-twentieth century are especially interesting to consider.

At this same time of segregation, there were individual students and faculty at Guilford who participated in interracial efforts both on and off campus. Influential faculty members served as leaders in interracial and social justice organizations in Greensboro and supported students in their efforts. However, these activities were not incorporated into the overall college mission nor receive full support. Therefore, activities waxed and waned depending upon the presence of specific individuals.

No exploration of Guilford's competing race relations narratives is complete without consideration of several influential faculty members. A key example is Dr. A. Daniel Beittel. Beittel came to Guilford as a sociology professor in 1936 and served as dean from 1937 to 1943. He was not a Quaker but felt drawn to the ideals he found expressed in Quakerism and briefly served as professor of religion at Guilford's sister institution, Indiana's Earlham College. Beittel was only at Earlham from 1929 to 1932. According to Earlham sources, he and the president, William C. Dennis, did not get along. Beittel was viewed as a socialist and his

commitment to interracial relations caused problems for him. He proposed for Earlham to host a visit by students of nearby Wilberforce University for a discussion of interracial relations. Apparently the taboo topic of interracial marriage was to be included in the discussion. The visit was cancelled by Earlham's president. Beittel soon thereafter departed from Earlham to serve as minister at Collegese Church in Tennessee for several years before coming to Guilford.

Dr. Beittel intentionally cultivated partnerships between Guilford and Greensboro's HBCUs, NC A&T University and Bennett College, as founder of the Greensboro Intercollegiate Interracial Forum. His former student write movingly of how these experience informed their lives and their ability to collaborate across racial lines. However, such work had to be carefully negotiated. One Guilford alum recalls an arrangement for a railcar for Guilford, Bennett, and A&T students to travel together to a national Y conference in the north in the late 1930s. Such organized cross campus collaborations do not appear to have consistently continued after Beittel's departure in the 1940s. He left Guilford to become president at Talledega College and later was president at Tougaloo College from 1960 to 1964. His response as Tougaloo's leader to student involvement in civil rights protests was, not surprisingly, different from Guilford's president.

In 1954, the same year that the Brown versus Board of Education Supreme Court decision invalidated segregation, Guilford advertised itself as the "home college for white men" with the rationale that Greensboro already had women's colleges and a university for African Americans. Guilford was not considering a change in enrollment in the near future. A cautious faculty statement in 1956 stated that "no student should be denied admission to a Christian college because of race, nationality, religion, or political thinking," but went on to stress integration as an ideal rather than an immediate realistic goal and discouraged several options. Trustees and administrators continued to deny lodging for interracial conferences sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee. The integration debate would continue into the 1960s. One supporter stated Guilford was not integrated "on account of contempt for the Negro and fear or publicity." Opponents argued the opinion that integration would cause decreased enrollment, social problems, and alumni dissatisfaction. College President Clyde Milner said "that Negro students would not be accepted until the Board of Trustees as a body was willing to accept them."

The Board of Trustees was definitely a controlling party in the integration decision. Several faculty members had been actively requesting integration. President Milner was the individuals who recruited A.D. Beittel to Guilford in the 1930s based on their experience working together at Earlham. Therefore, it would seem that Milner was potential open to cross racial collaborations and perhaps even integration. However, the person who was the final decider in this era was the college's board chair, Robert Frazier.

Frazier provides fascinating study of power and privilege in the mid-20th century South. He was a strong proponent of separate but equal. He supported African American institutions and encouraged establishment of resources in eastern Greensboro. However, he saw no need for and actively discouraged racial mixing. Frazer was a Quaker from Greensboro. He attended

Guilford and received his law degree from UNC. After a period of foreign service, he joined his brother's law practice and became a community leader. In 1952 Frazier was simultaneously chair of the Guilford College Board and on the A&T Boards of Trustees as well as mayor of the city of Greensboro. He also was an influential leader in the Greensboro's leading Quaker Meeting (or church). He was simultaneously chair of the trustees at both Guilford and A&T from 1957 to 1969 -- a crucial period for race relations in Greensboro. A&T Chancellor Dowdy commended Frazier's "excellent leadership in molding the board into a unified whole working toward improving the programs of the school." With his co-commitment to both institutions, he saw no need to open Guilford to African-Americans and no reason for whites to attend HBCUs. There is also no evidence of his using his joint ties to connect the institutions in any way. Any collaborations between A&T and Guilford were undertaken by individual students and faculty (and usually under the radar without approval from the top).

Frazier does not make his strict commitment to segregation explicit in college documentation. He is on record that Guilford had no policies of exclusion but that qualified African American students simply hadn't applied -- a statement refuted by qualified individuals who report that they had tested the policy and been rejected. However, his views are presented in his personal papers relating to his work with his church. When asked if African Americans were welcome, he said they had their own churches and should any prefer Quaker worship, suggested that his church support a project in east Greensboro for them. This was not a view held by all in his congregation -- they were divided on the issue and Frazier was definitely a leader on the segregationist side of the debate.

Integration in 1962 did not bring an end to exclusion and inconsistencies within campus policy and dominant campus culture. People of color remained a disproportionate minority with only token numbers, usually no more than two or three students of African descent per class year, until the late 1960s. The overall campus culture and institutional structures often reflected the inherent racism present in the wider community.

The Guilford community was also grappling with responses to and involvement in the broader Civil Rights Movement. Thus far, there is no clear documentation of Guilford students participating directly in the influential February 1960 Woolworth lunch counter sit-ins. Several inquiries have been received by the college by Guilford supporters who take issue with Guilford being "left out" of the Woolworth sit-in history. They assume that Guilford must have been on the front lines with student participation as a Quaker founded institution with an anti-slavery history. The leaders of that 1960 movement and other students actions of that decade were from Greensboro's HBCUs. The downtown area historically white UNC-Greensboro and Greensboro College, both women's college's at the time, had student involvement. However, evidence indicates that Guilford students from the western edge of town did not join until later and were not supported by their college's administration when they did so.

A relatively small number of students at Guilford individually sought to collaborate with other Greensboro college students in interracial actions through the Congress of Racial Equality

(CORE) and partnering with students at NC A&T and Bennett in that work. White Guilford student Beth Taylor wrote movingly at the time of her experience being arrested at a downtown sit-in in May 1963 and the disappointment she felt at Guilford's official reaction to her quest for racial justice. She had come thinking Quaker commitments to social justice would make Guilford an ideal place to be a student with an interest in civil rights. Her experience in 1963 led her to transfer elsewhere.

The question for Guilford today is how a historically white institution might best live into its stated aspirational values of equality and justice, with acknowledgement of past missteps and transgressions, to construct a future that supports all students to their fullest potential regardless of race.

CONCLUSION: QUERIES FOR GUILFORD TODAY

Quaker practice has traditionally placed a focus on discernment and asking questions rather than making creedal statements. Therefore, I'd like to close with some queries for consideration. While these are posed for Guilford specifically, perhaps they will also resonate with those at other institutions.

- How are we informed by our founding identity? Does our narrative of valuing equality function to silence instances when our institutional cultural and practices have discouraged rather than cultivated equity and inclusion?
- What do we mean by equality? How do we transform from a concept of equality to a reality of equity?
- Are there "comfortable choices" we choose to make today coming from our places of privilege? Are we aware of the privileges that exist for some and not others? Are we cognizant of those choices?
- Who do we as an institution prioritize for our partnerships? Who do we seek out as our co-collaborators, educational colleagues, and community members?
- How do we negotiate Guilford as both an institution with deep and long aspirational values associated with social justice and an institution entangled in a culture of white supremacy?