Antislavery in Print
The Germantown Protest, the “Exhortation,” and the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Debate on Slavery

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ABSTRACT “Antislavery in Print” reexamines the first two North American antislavery petitions in terms of colonial print culture and Quaker politics. It also argues that there is an authorial link between these two important texts. The first antislavery protest was composed in 1688 by German-Dutch immigrants in Germantown, Pennsylvania, and was circulated in manuscript form within the Quaker community. The second document, the Exhortation and Caution to Friends concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes, was published by William Bradford in 1693 and has been widely attributed to George Keith, a schismatic Quaker who was expelled from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1692.

This essay argues that the Exhortation should not be ascribed solely to Keith. It was a communal effort that should be attributed to the Christian Quakers, the splinter group founded by Keith. The Christian Quakers were nonelite English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, German, and Dutch Quakers, a number of whom were directly involved in the creation of the Germantown Protest. Keith himself never expressed radical antislavery sentiments, either before or after the publication of the Exhortation, but he did play an important role in arranging for its publication. Once printed, however, the Exhortation lost credibility within the orthodox Philadelphia Quaker community because it became part of a polemical print war that George Keith was waging against the orthodox Quakers.

In October 1693 a group of Christian Quakers in Philadelphia gathered at their Monthly Meeting to compose a protest against slavery.¹ The protest,

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¹. Christian Quakers was the name applied to a Quaker splinter group, led by George Keith, who left the orthodox Meeting during the Keithian Controversy of 1692–93.

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entitled *An Exhortation and Caution to Friends concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes*, was printed by William Bradford later the same year and has been lauded as “the first protest against slavery printed in America.” The *Exhortation* condemned slavery and called on all Christians to recognize that “Negroes, Blacks, and Taunies are a real part of Mankind, for whom Christ hath shed his precious Blood, and are capable of Salvation, as well as White Men.” The *Exhortation* was the second protest against slavery written in the American colonies and the first to be printed. It was preceded by the 1688 “Germantown Protest,” composed by a group of German and Dutch Quakers living a half day’s walk from Philadelphia. The “Germantown Protest,” like the *Exhortation*, attacked slavery on moral and practical grounds and argued that Quakers (many of whom were slave owners at the time) should forbid slavery. The Germantowners submitted their protest to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, where it was rejected for having “so General a Relation to many other Prts.” The *Exhortation*, on the other hand, was not even honored with a dismissal in the Yearly Meeting. Printed in the midst of an acrimonious schism, it was ignored by the orthodox Quaker Meetings.

This essay investigates the relationship between the first two antislavery documents, paying close attention to how they fit into the seventeenth-century world of Quaker printing, politics, and slave owning. Why were they written when they were? How were they related? What can we conclude about the authorship of the two documents, and how can this information contribute to our understanding of the shifting Quaker perceptions of slavery? Placing the publication of these two documents within the transatlantic world of Quakerism, this essay is divided into three sections. The first is a brief description of Quaker thought on slavery in the late seventeenth century. It argues that though some English Quaker leaders like George Fox may have advocated for limited terms for slaves, they were still operating under a worldview that fundamentally accepted slavery. Their call


4. “Germantown Protest,” 1688. Original at the Haverford College Library in Quaker and Special Collections. The petition was submitted first to the Abington Monthly Meeting, then to the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, and finally to the Yearly Meeting, where it was rejected.
was for evangelization, not antislavery, and the difference between these two concepts needs to be highlighted. Christianizing slaves was an attempt to adapt the slave system to the English ideal of the patriarchal household and the Hebraic ideal of servitude, whereby slaves or servants obeyed commands from the patriarch and the Lord. If the English Quaker ideal of the slave-owning household can be compared to any ideology of the eighteenth or nineteenth century, it is benevolent paternalism, not radical abolition.

The second section investigates the emergence of antislavery thought in the trans-Atlantic Quaker community by assessing the historical relationship between the first two antislavery protests. Some scholars have implied a historical association between these two documents, but none has found a definitive connection. This essay argues that there is an authorial link between the 1688 “Germantown Protest” and the 1693 Exhortation: at least one of the authors of the 1688 “Protest,” Abraham op den Graeff, was directly involved in the creation of the Exhortation. It also argues against the widespread assumption that the Exhortation was the brainchild of George Keith, the Quaker schismatic who founded a splinter group in Pennsylvania called the Christian Quakers in 1692–93. Though this argument is not new, most scholars and bibliographies have continued to identify George Keith as the sole author of the Exhortation. This assertion is problematic because, among other things, Keith never expressed radical antislavery sentiments, either before or after the publication of the Exhortation. Most important, giving Keith full authorial credit obscures the origin of the ideas in the Exhortation. Its antislavery ideology should be attributed to nonelite German, Dutch, Welsh, Irish, Scottish, and English Quakers.

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5. J. William Frost implied a connection between the 1688 “Protest” and the 1693 Exhortation, but he did not define the link: “In 1688 some Germantown Quakers petitioned Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for the abolition of slavery. After some discussion the Yearly Meeting essentially shelved the petition. In 1693 the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Keithian Quakers wrote a searing indictment of slavery and the cruel treatment it produced.” Frost, The Keithian Controversy, xvii. He also suggested that Keith himself was an antislavery reformer: “Reforms espoused by Keith, such as freeing slaves . . . were now beyond the pale of discussion.” Ibid., xx.

6. Early English Books Online lists George Keith as the author of the Exhortation, as do Carla Mulford, ed., Early American Writing (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors, eds., The New Literary History of America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 70. Early American Imprints lists the author of the Exhortation as the “Monthly Meeting of Friends of Philadelphia,” which is also incorrect, as I point out below.
who had been heavily influenced by the ideas introduced by the German-Dutch settlers in Germantown, Pennsylvania.

George Keith did, however, play an important role in arranging for the publication of the *Exhortation*. As a skilled Quaker controversialist, Keith knew how to capitalize on the influence of the printing press. During the Quaker schism of 1692–93, Keith used the printing press as a weapon against the orthodox Quakers, and the *Exhortation* was just one of several tracts that William Bradford published for Keith. In the final section, this essay asks why—or whether—it was important that the *Exhortation* was printed and the “Germantown Protest” was not. Recent scholarship on the history of the book in colonial America has downplayed the significance of printing and suggested that scribal publication—the circulation of handwritten texts—was an accepted, respected, and widespread method of circulating texts that often complemented or replaced printing. As David D. Hall has pointed out, many of the most important seventeenth-century texts—including John Winthrop’s “Modell of Christian Charitie” and William Bradford’s *Of Plymouth Plantation*—were not published until decades or centuries after they were written. Hall has suggested that historians need to look more closely at the historical context surrounding the creation of both handwritten and printed texts in order to illuminate the relative significance of these two technologies and how they functioned in seventeenth-century colonial America. As this essay will argue, the *Exhortation* took on new meaning as a printed text. As a cultural practice, Quakers tended to print texts that fell into three distinct categories: educational pamphlets, intra-Quaker documents identifiable by their flowery introductions, and polemical tracts that were usually addressed to the non-Quaker community. The *Exhortation* was printed not as an intra-Quaker epistle but as a polemic in George Keith’s propaganda war against the orthodox Philadelphia Quakers. By using the text as an attack rather than presenting it as a scribal publication, Keith imbued the text with a polemical air that undermined its argument and detracted from its authority in Philadelphia.

**QUAKERS AND SLAVERY IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: EVANGELIZATION VS. ANTISLavery**

Until recently, Quaker slavery tended to be described by scholars as an unfortunate phase in an otherwise laudable history of antislavery activism. In

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Thomas Drake’s 1950 publication *Quakers and Slavery*, the first chapter—which covered the entire seventeenth century of Quaker slaveholding—was entitled “Slavery Troubles the Quaker Conscience,” suggesting that slavery was always disturbing to the Quakers, and it merely took time for Friends to recognize the evil of the institution. Thirteen years later, Sydney V. James saw a similar progression of increasing awareness in *A People among Peoples: Quaker Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century America*, though he couched antislavery within a larger narrative about humanitarianism. In 1985 Jean Soderlund took a more critical look at the development of Quaker antislavery, arguing that the Quaker embrace of antislavery came in two forms: the idealistic and humanitarian approach of Anthony Benezet and John Woolman and the “tribalistic” approach of many Quakers who were concerned about maintaining a tight-knit and exclusive community structure. Yet Soderlund’s focus on the eighteenth century meant that the earliest antislavery documents were surveyed but not examined in depth. Indeed, though a growing number of manuscripts have focused on the Quaker turn against slavery in the eighteenth century, very little has been written on seventeenth-century antislavery thought as part of the seventeenth century, rather than as a prelude to the eighteenth century. George Fox’s feelings on slavery, for example, are usually described as a step toward abolition.

11. Thomas Drake argued that George Fox had “characteristic clarity of insight” in seeing the “spiritual danger inherent in the master-slave relationship” (*Quakers and Slavery*, 5). See also Kenneth Carroll, “George Fox and Slavery,” *Quaker History* 86, no. 2 (1997): 16–25. Carroll urged scholars to consider Fox’s influence when discussing the larger topic of Quaker antislavery. Jerry Frost described Fox’s perspective on slavery as “very progressive as compared to virtually all other Quaker and non-Quaker visitors to the West Indies,” though he also argued that Fox’s failure to directly condemn slavery made it easier for “conservative slave-owning Friends . . . to silence the abolitionists.” J. William Frost, “George Fox’s Ambiguous Anti-Slavery Legacy,” in Michael Mullet, ed., *New Light on George Fox* (York, U.K.: Ebor Press, 1994), 69, 70. Brycchan Carey’s 2007 *Ariel* article is an exception to this trend. Though Carey’s title connects Fox’s thoughts on slavery to the development of Quaker antislavery, he argues that “we should not seek . . . to compare Fox with later abolitionists, but instead to ask what contribution he made to emerging discourses about slavery and colonization.” Carey, “The Power That Giveth Lib-
approach can be useful, but it tends to obscure the significance of Quaker struggles with slavery within a specifically seventeenth-century context.

In the past decade scholars such as Larry Gragg and Kristin Block have begun to investigate Quaker slaveholding in Barbados, asking how slavery functioned in tandem with Quaker life.12 Block’s work has focused increasingly on Quaker evangelizing rather than antislavery thought. This shift is an important one because it highlights the idea that Fox, like other evangelizing Quakers in the seventeenth century, was not a proponent of antislavery but of well-ordered Quaker households with Christian slaves. Recognizing the difference between evangelization and antislavery makes it clear that Quaker slave owning was relatively uncontroversial in the mid- to late seventeenth century. And when conscientious Quakers such as George Fox had difficulty reconciling slave societies like Barbados with Quaker principles, they turned to the English past, with its ideals of the Christian household, not to ideas about social equality.

Quaker evangelization to slaves had its roots in the earliest period of Quakerism, when Friends were zealously traveling the world, spreading the Word of God.13 In 1655 Ann Austin and Mary Fisher, two Quaker missionaries, landed on the island of Barbados on their way to New England. The two women had some success converting European residents of Barbados to Quakerism, and the island would eventually become known as the “Nursery of Truth” in recognition of the more than one thousand Friends who lived there in the latter half of the seventeenth century.14 Just two years after Austin and Fisher’s arrival in Barbados, George Fox wrote a letter entitled “To Friends beyond Sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves,” his first attempt to reconcile Quakerism with the Atlantic slave system. In this


letter Fox urged Friends to “love all men” and recognize that God “hath made all Nations of one Blood.” Fox, who regarded slaves as being either black or Indian, reminded his followers that “the Gospel is preached to every creature under Heaven; which is the Power, that giveth Liberty and Freedom, and is Glad Tidings to every Captivated Creature under the whole Heavens.” In other words, Fox was concerned that non-European slaves had not had the opportunity to hear the Gospel, and he called on Friends to be universal in their missionary efforts.

Though Fox stressed universal evangelization in 1657, equating slaves with all “captivated creature[s],” his understanding of slavery shifted once he had seen Atlantic slavery in person. In 1671 Fox traveled to Barbados with a group of Friends. After a monthlong sickness, Fox gave a sermon to Barbadian Quakers in which he articulated his reaction to slavery using metaphors of order, authority, and familial structure. The sermon, which was later published under the title Gospel Family-Order, Being a Short Discourse concerning the Ordering of Families, both of Whites, Blacks and Indians, provides great insight into Fox’s thoughts on slavery, freedom, and the proper order of the world. Fox described how his “Spirit [was] troubled . . . to see that Families were not brought into Order.” Responding to what he considered promiscuity among slaves, he reminded his followers that “God made . . . Male and Female, not one Man and many Women, but a Man and a Woman.” Fox believed that the “polygamous” behavior of black slaves was corrupting the sacred Quaker household. To combat corruption, he encouraged Friends to “preach the everlasting Covenant, Christ Jesus, to the Ethyopians, the Blacks and the Tawny-Moors . . . in your families.” Introducing slaves to Christianity would allow them to “be free Men indeed.”

Fox’s stance on slavery and evangelism crystallized upon his return to England, when he published a response to his experience in Barbados, an

15. Text reproduced in Carey, “‘The Power That Giveth Liberty and Freedom’”; emphases added. Carey provides an in-depth analysis of Fox’s rhetoric in this and other texts relating to slavery.

16. George Fox, Gospel Family-Order, Being a Short Discourse concerning the Ordering of Families, both of Whites, Blacks and Indians (1676); emphases added. Fox also encouraged Friends to limit the terms of their slaves. Though some have argued that this is evidence of nascent antislavery sentiment, it is better understood as an attempt to modify and ameliorate the slave system. In the late seventeenth century slavery was still in the process of becoming defined as lifelong, inheritable, and race-based. Seventeenth-century Quakers, a number of whom had been slaves as well, would have been particularly attuned to the malleable definition of slavery at the time.
eighty-page diatribe addressed To the ministers, teachers and priests (so-called and so stiling your-selves) in Barbadoes. In addition to berating the non-Quaker spiritual leaders for immoral behavior and the disorderly nature of non-Quaker English households, Fox attacked the Anglican ministry for refusing to convert slaves and Indians, asking, “And if you be Ministers of Christ, are you not Teachers of Blacks and Taunies (to wit, Indians) as well as of the Whites? For, is not the Gospel to be preached to all Creatures?” By making evangelization the linchpin of his attack on the Anglican church in Barbados, Fox defined the dominant Quaker position on slavery as pro-conversion, not antislavery. In the decades following his trip to Barbados, Fox continued to urge Friends to convert their slaves, and, as J. William Frost has concluded, he did “not appear to have ever questioned the legitimacy of slavery.” Once slaves were Christianized, they could mimic the role of the Christian servant in the idealized Christian household.

ANTI-SLAVERY IN PENNSYLVANIA: THE “GERMANTOWN PROTEST” OF 1688 AND THE EXHORTATION

The first two written protestations against slavery emerged not in the West Indies, where thousands of Quakers lived with slaves, but in the marginal colonial outpost of Pennsylvania, the newly founded Quaker colony. The

17. It should be noted that William Edmunson, an Irish Quaker missionary who traveled to Barbados with George Fox, is an exception to this trend. During Edmunson’s second trip to Barbados in 1675, there was an attempted slave rebellion on the island, and Anglicans there blamed Quaker proselytizing for the uprising. Edmunson reported in his journal that he was attacked by an Anglican minister named Ramsey and subsequently by Governor Atkins for “making the Negroes Christians, and [making] them rebel and cut their Throats.” The following year, Edmunson wrote two letters to Friends in which can be seen a shift in his position on slavery. While he still believed that conversion would restrain slaves from “their accustomed filthy, unclean practices, in defileing one another,” he also argued that “perpetuall Slavery is an Agrivasion, and an Oppression upon the Mind.” Frost, in “George Fox’s Ambiguous Anti-Slavery Legacy,” has suggested that this change in view could have been spurred by Edmunson’s trip to New England in the wake of King Philip’s War, but I would argue that it was his experience in Barbados in the wake of the attempted rebellion, in which it became clear that Anglican slave owners were vehemently against slave conversion, that convinced Edmunson to rethink the ideal of the Quaker slaveholding family.

18. Ibid., 73.

19. Portions of this section have been reworked from two of my previous articles: Katharine Gerbner, “‘We Are against the Traffik of Men-Body’: The Germantown Quaker Protest of 1688 and the Origins of American Abolitionism,” Pennsylvania History 74, no. 2 (2007): 149–72, and “The Ultimate Sin: Christianising Slaves
first protest, composed in 1688 by a group of German-Dutch immigrants who had arrived in the Americas just years earlier, has been well studied by scholars. Lauded by the Quaker historian William Hull as “the memorable flower which blossomed in Pennsylvania from the seed of Quakerism,” the “Germantown Protest” has served to strengthen the Quaker abolitionist identity by providing deep roots for the antislavery movement in American history. Both scholars and nonscholars alike have been drawn to the protest because it is one of the first documents to make a humanitarian argument against slavery. This approach, based on a declaration of rights for the enslaved, was in contrast with most English Quaker antislavery rhetoric in the seventeenth century. English Quakers, when they took a stand against slavery or the slave trade, tended to focus on exclusionist principles rather than ideas about human equality. The first “warning” against slave importation issued by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, for example, demanded that Friends “be more careful not to Encourage the bringing in of any more Negroes, and that such that have Negroes be Careful of them, bring them from Loose, and Lewd Living as much in them lies, and from Rambling abroad on First Days or other Times.” The exclusionist reasoning behind this warning was in stark contrast to both the “Germantown Protest” and the Exhortation.

In this section I argue that the philosophical similarity between the “Germantown Protest” and the Exhortation is due to the influence of Germantown Quakers on the latter document. The Germantown Quakers, most of whom had been Mennonites before their conversion, hailed from the borderlands between modern-day Holland and Germany. Over the past three centuries, scholars have disagreed over the ethnic, national, and religious identities of these original settlers. Some have called them ex-Mennonite Quakers and Hull (1932), and others have argued that the German-towners were Dutch Quakers. What must be taken into account is that ethnic, national, and religious boundaries were not defined as they are today. It is clear, however, that nearly all the Krefelders and Krisheimers were Quakers when they

21. By “humanitarian” I mean an antislavery argument that is grounded in a concern for the humanity of the enslaved. Most other seventeenth-century Quaker antislavery arguments focused on the corrupt influence of slaves and aimed to protect the Quaker community.
23. Over the past three centuries, scholars have disagreed over the ethnic, national, and religious identities of these original settlers. Some have called them ex-Mennonite Quakers and Hull (1932), and others have argued that the German-towners were Dutch Quakers. What must be taken into account is that ethnic, national, and religious boundaries were not defined as they are today. It is clear, however, that nearly all the Krefelders and Krisheimers were Quakers when they
ence of persecution during and after the Thirty Years’ War, along with their nonconformist principles, made it relatively easy for William Penn to convince them to emigrate to Pennsylvania. Yet despite a number of overlapping beliefs, the founders of Germantown arrived in Pennsylvania with a distinctive culture and a desire to create their own separate community.24 The Germantowners, the first of whom arrived in Pennsylvania in 1683, consistently set themselves apart from the rest of the immigrant population in Pennsylvania. Upon arrival in 1683, Francis Daniel Pastorius, one of the protest’s signers, insisted—against William Penn’s preference—that the Dutch and German settlers be given land together, rather than in dispersed pockets around Philadelphia. In 1689 the Germantowners were granted the first charter to become a borough, the only one of its kind ever to be issued in Pennsylvania (see Hull, William Penn and the Dutch Quaker Migration, Appendix 4) and had practiced Quakerism in their native lands. The majority had been Mennonites before Quaker missionaries like William Ames and William Penn arrived in the Netherlands and Germany in the mid-seventeenth century. See Hull, William Penn and the Dutch Quaker Migration to Pennsylvania, 285.

in Pennsylvania. This political freedom lent Germantown such an air of independence that in 1701 the town argued that it should be exempt from Pennsylvania taxes.

The Germantowners’ determination to remain autonomous, together with their lack of acquaintance with English Quaker conventions, presented them with a unique perspective on Quaker slave ownership in Pennsylvania. Their normative place within the Quaker Meeting hierarchy, meanwhile, gave them a moral and religious voice with which to speak to the English Quakers and create what has become, in the past two centuries, a defining symbol of Quaker abolitionism. The “Germantown Protest,” written in 1688 and submitted to the Abington Monthly Meeting for consideration, conceived of blacks as the social and spiritual equals of whites. The Germantowners argued that there was “no more liberty” to have blacks as slaves as it was to have “other white ones,” and in their phrasing of the Golden Rule, the Germantowners added the stipulation that no distinction should be made on the basis of “generation, descent or colour.” They also compared the oppression of blacks in Pennsylvania to the oppression of Quakers and Mennonites in Europe. Since the oppression of Quakers and Mennonites was of a social nature, this suggests that the Germantowners believed that blacks, like Quakers in Europe, deserved to be treated as political citizens, not slaves.

The protest included some practical antislavery arguments as well. At three separate points, the authors noted that their friends and acquaintances were hesitant to emigrate to a land with slaves. The “marketable” aspects of Pennsylvania were its inexpensive land, its unobtrusive government, and its religious liberty, but the institution of slavery—with its potential for slave rebellion, also mentioned in the protest—worked against this image. For the Germantowners, who were desperate to attract more settlers from their own homelands, this was a major concern. But their primary concern, and the core of their argument, remained humanitarian. The Germantown

25. The borough was run by a small handful of citizens, as opposed to the more democratic political structure of later Pennsylvania boroughs. For more information, see Harry M. Tinkcom and Margaret M. Tinkcom, Historic Germantown (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1955), 6.
26. Ibid., 7.
Quakers thoroughly rejected the “traffik of men-body” and called for “liberty of ye body” to accompany “liberty of conscience.” The Germantowners presented their protest to the Monthly Meeting at Abington, where it was deemed too “weighty” an issue and referred to the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting.28 The members of the Quarterly Meeting again deferred judgment and sent the “Germantown Protest” to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the reigning Meeting in Pennsylvania.29 There the motion was rejected for having “so General a Relation to many other Prts.”30

The Exhortation and Caution to Friends concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes was published five years after the “Germantown Protest,” and the

28. Francis Daniel Pastorius and Abraham and Derick op de Graeff were the likely representatives of the Germantown Preparatory Meeting. For more information, see Hull, William Penn and the Dutch Quaker Migration. Also, in 1688 the Abington meeting was referred to as the “Dublin Meeting.” Throughout this article, I have chosen to use the modern name in order to avoid confusion.

29. In 1688 the Yearly Meeting was held at Burlington, not Philadelphia.

philosophical similarity between the two texts is striking, particularly when compared to other antislavery documents of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Whereas other Quaker antislavery texts of the seventeenth century based their arguments against slavery on the dangers of having blacks in a Quaker household and only marginally included a moral opposition to the slave trade, both the Exhortation and the “Germantown Protest” argued that bodily freedom should accompany spiritual freedom. The following two passages demonstrate this common sentiment in each of the two documents. While they differ stylistically, their philosophical perspective is rooted in the same values.

From An Exhortation and Caution to Friends, 1693:

Negroes, Blacks and Taunies are a real part of Mankind, for whom Christ hath shed his precious Blood, and are capable of salvation, as well as White Men. . . . Christ commanded, saying All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them. Therefore we and our Children would not be kept in perpetual Bondage and Slavery against our Consent, neither should we keep them in perpetual Bondage and Slavery against their Consent.

From the “Germantown Protest,” 1688:

Now, tho 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 doe to all men like as we will be done ourselves; making no difference of what generation, descent or colour they are. And those who steal or robb men, and those who buy or purchase them, are they not all alike? Here is liberty of conscience, wch is right and reasonable; here ought to be likewise liberty of ye body, except of evil-doers, wch is an other case. But to bring men hither, or to rob and sell them against their will, we stand against.

Both the “Germantown Protest” and the Exhortation reject social hierarchies based on race, insisting that “White Men” or “white ones” should have no more “liberty” than “negroes, blacks and taunies.” They base their arguments on a restatement of the Golden Rule, taking it much further than Fox had in his Gospel Family-Order. While Fox encouraged Friends to

31. See, for example, the antislavery tracts of Cadwalader Morgan and Robert Piles reprinted in Frost, The Quaker Origins of Antislavery, 70, 71.
33. “Germantown Protest.”
treat blacks and Indians as Friends would want to be treated in a “slavish Condition,” he did not conclude that the “slavish condition” itself was unlawful. Both the *Exhortation* and the “Germantown Protest” take this critical step, arguing that because “we and our Children would not be kept in perpetual Bondage and Slavery against our Consent, neither should we keep them in perpetual Bondage and Slavery against their Consent.”

Though some scholars have noted the similarity between these documents, no one has made a firm connection between their authors. The *Exhortation* has often been ascribed to George Keith, the Quaker schismatic, but this claim is misleading. Keith probably played a part in the creation of the text, but he should not be considered the sole author of the *Exhortation*.

The text does not refer to him, nor did Keith sign it. The attribution to Keith may be based on a handwritten note on the first page of the *Exhortation* located at the Friends Reference Library in London and reproduced online in the Early American Imprint Series. The handwriting on the first page is nearly undecipherable, but it most probably reads: “by Keith + his party (not a sizable party). A good subject tainted by a bad spirit. 1693.” The only two easily recognized parts of this sentence are “Keith” and “1693.” A second handwritten note at the end of the document questions the first note and confirms the shaky connection between Keith and the *Exhortation*. It asks, “qu: if by G. Keith’s party?”

Once the text is examined in its original printed form, it becomes clear that the *Exhortation* was authored by a group of people and that it should be understood as a communal effort, rather than an individual one. The authorial note in the original printed text reads: “Given forth by our Monthly Meeting in Philadelphia, the 13th day of the 8th Month, 1693, and recommended to all our Friends and Brethren, who are one with us in our Testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ, and all others professing Christianity.” While this note confirms the social authorship of the *Exhortation*, it has added to the confusion surrounding the text: without reference to Keith or the Christian Quakers, the *Exhortation* has sometimes been credited to the Monthly Meeting of the orthodox Friends. Evans’s *American Bibliography*, for example, attributes the *Exhortation* to the Society of


35. *An Exhortation & Caution to Friends Concerning buying or keeping of Negroes*, Early American Imprints, ser. 1, no. 636, pp. 1, 6.

Friends, and the Early American Imprints Series attributes it to the “Monthly Meeting of Friends in Philadelphia,” both of which are incorrect: the Keithian or “Christian Quakers” were not part of the orthodox Quaker meeting. Still, they considered themselves to be the true Quakers, which probably explains why they referred to themselves as members of the “Monthly Meeting in Philadelphia,” rather than the “Monthly Meeting of Keithian Quakers.”

There is only one small textual reference that confirms that the *Exhortation* was written by the Keithians: on page 3, the authors write: “Some Reasons and Causes of our being against Negroes for Terms of Life: First, Because it is contrary to the Principles and Practice of the Christian Quakers to buy Prize or Stollen Goods, which we bore a faithful Testimony against in our Native Country.” This small reference to the “Principles and Practice of the Christian Quakers” is the only hint, aside from the two handwritten notes, that the *Exhortation* is not a product of the orthodox Meeting.

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The use of the first person plural and the collaborative nature of the text confirm that *Exhortation* should be attributed to the Christian Quakers and not solely to Keith, who never before or again took a serious stance on African slavery. Keith’s primary concerns were theological and institutional, not social: Keith believed that Philadelphia Quakers had downplayed the relevance of the scriptures and that the Ministerial Assembly had acquired too much power. 39 Keith's followers echoed many of these fears. But they also had different aims, and a different perspective on Philadelphia Quaker society. Unlike Keith, many of the Christian Quakers were thoroughly concerned about the institution of slavery, and they wanted it outlawed in their new home. 40

So who were Keith’s followers? And how can they be linked to the “Germantown Protest”? The Christian Quakers, who were often referred to as the “Keithians,” were an unusual group. When Keith was disowned by the Philadelphia Meeting in 1692, most of his powerful supporters abandoned him. As a result, leadership positions in the Keithian group that were normally reserved for elite Friends were open to “especially obscure persons.” 41 Jon Butler has documented that individuals otherwise absent from the historical record make their first and only textual appearance as Keithians, and Gary Nash has argued that “the Keithian movement provided a popular means of expressing opposition to an upper layer of Quakers whose political domination was becoming brittle and overbearing.” Small-time farmers and craftsmen of English, Welsh, Irish, Scottish, Dutch, and German origin became Keith’s biggest supporters. 42 The Christian Quakers who came together in Keith’s support were a transitory group: the Keithians themselves split soon after George Keith’s departure from British America, and the movement died out by the end of the century. 43 But in the meantime, a

39. Keith’s views are more fully described in the last section of this essay.
40. At least a few of the Christian Quakers were also slave owners, which suggests that slavery may have been a factious issue even within the splinter group, but that the antislavery contingent used this moment to their advantage. See Gary Nash and Jean Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 44.
42. Ibid., and Gary Nash, *Quakers and Politics* (1968; repr., Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 154. Butler has taken issue with what he sees as Nash’s overemphasis on economic and political analysis, but the two scholars agree that the Keithian movement was composed of nonelites.
43. Butler, “Into Pennsylvania’s Spiritual Abyss.”
diverse group of dissatisfied Quakers united in their rejection of orthodox Philadelphia Quakerism and the accepted Quaker practice of buying and selling African slaves.

The philosophical similarity between the Exhortation and the “Germantown Protest”—and the appearance of the Exhortation in the first place—is not a coincidence. At least twelve of Keith’s Christian Quakers were residents of Germantown, and one of Keith’s strongest supporters, Abraham op den Graeff, signed the 1688 protest. Abraham op den Graeff was probably a leader in the Keithian movement. He was one of just six individuals, including Keith, to sign an Appeal from the Twenty Eight Judges, to the Spirit of Truth and true Judgment in all faithful Friends, called Quakers, that meet at this Yearly Meeting at Burlington, the 7th Month, 1692, which defended Keith against the attacks of the leading orthodox Quakers.44 Two months later, op den Graeff was again one of just six individuals to sign a paper addressed to the orthodox Meeting regarding the formation of the Christian Quaker Meeting.45 Herman op den Graeff, Abraham’s brother, is listed alongside ten other Germantowners as one of those who “have formerly frequented Friends Meetings and have Since followed George Keith or Others.”46

Abraham op den Graeff’s active involvement in the creation of both the “Germantown Protest” and the Exhortation confirms that there is a philosophical and historical continuity between the two documents. The Exhortation even notes the lack of slavery in “some parts of Europe,” a reference that could have been easily provided by Abraham op den Graeff or any of the Germantowners. But despite the philosophical similarity between the “Germantown Protest” and the Exhortation, the texts are written in different linguistic styles. Previously, I have argued that the “Germantown Protest” was both philosophically and linguistically unusual.47 Although it was written by Quakers and for Quakers, it did not follow normal intra-Quaker textual conventions: it lacked a flowery introduction and scriptural references, both of which were found in virtually every late seventeenth-century text written for and by Quakers. These aberrations were due to the authors’

44. Frost, The Keithian Controversy, 122.
45. Ibid., 134.
46. See ibid., 371–75, Document 19. The op den Graeff brothers were joined by their wives, as well as Cornelius Sidcot and his wife; Jacob Isaac Vanbiber and his wife; Isaac Jacobs Vanbiber and his wife; Mathias Isaacs Vanbiber; Jan Doeden; and David Scherckjes.
47. Gerbner, “‘We Are against the Trafﬁk of Men-Body.’”
shaky knowledge of English as well as their lack of familiarity with English Quaker customs. The *Exhortation*, unlike the “Germantown Protest,” is written and organized much like other English Quaker texts: it relies heavily on scriptural citations to support its philosophical argument, a common formula used by English Quakers. It opens with a basic introduction and then details five primary reasons for the abolition of slavery, each based on a biblical passage. These reasons include the evils of buying stolen goods, the commandment of the Golden Rule, Christ’s compassion for those in misery, and the fundamental belief that all humans experience the Light of God and are capable of salvation.

These characteristics suggest that the *Exhortation* was written by native English speakers who were better acquainted with English Quaker rhetoric. It is also possible that Keith may have played a part in the composition of the document. The forceful rhetorical style, the extensive use of scripture, and the emphasis on the historical Jesus can all be seen as typical of Keith. Yet even if Keith had a hand in the creation of the *Exhortation*, a distinction needs to be made between the document’s rhetoric and its philosophical argument. The *Exhortation* may be typically English Quaker in style, but the philosophical stance on slavery is unlike that taken in any other English Quaker document. The use of a humanitarian-based antislavery argument in the *Exhortation*, combined with the established influence of Abraham op den Graeff and other Germantowners, speaks to the influence of German-Dutch ideas. The Germantowners had not stopped talking about slavery when the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting rejected their petition: their ideas were reformulated in a distinctively English style in the *Exhortation*.

**GEORGE KEITH AND THE POLITICS OF PRINTING IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY PENNSYLVANIA**

To understand the significance of the *Exhortation* and its effect on Quaker ideas about slavery, it is important to examine the political controversy that surrounded the writing and publication of the second protest against slavery. In 1693, the year when the *Exhortation* was printed, the Quaker community in Philadelphia was in the midst of an acrimonious schism, due primarily to the presence of George Keith. Keith was a skilled theologian and Scotsman who arrived in Jersey in 1685 as a surveyor and moved to the Philadelphia area in 1689 to head the Philadelphia Latin School. Upon his arrival, Keith was recognized and treated as a Public Friend, one of an elite group of Quakers who were identified as “prophets of the Lord.” The Public Friends, who kept separate Ministerial Assemblies, were responsible for dic-
tating Quaker discipline and practice, which included everything from marriages to finances, record keeping, and other business matters.48

Soon after his arrival in the colonies, Keith expressed displeasure about certain elements of Pennsylvania Quakerism. He disliked, among other things, the increasingly rigid hierarchy of the Philadelphia Quaker Meeting, the expanding power of the Ministerial Assembly, and the growing "spiritualism" of American Quakerism, in which the historical life, death, and bodily ascension of Jesus Christ were downplayed in favor of an emphasis on Inward Light.49 In 1690 Keith turned his criticism into a series of suggestions in Gospel Order and Discipline Improved, which he presented to the Public Friends at the Ministerial Assembly. In Gospel Order Improved, Keith described his vision for the organization of the Quaker community and argued that Quakers should be required to confess their faith.50 He found the institutional structure of Quakerism unsatisfactory and argued that Quakers should be required to assent to a Quaker creed and describe their own experiences with God before being able to join a Quaker Meeting. He also suggested that church government should be dictated by the entire membership, rather than by the Public Friends or a group of elders. In its organizational structure, Keith's vision most closely mirrored that of the gathered churches of New England and, as Jon Butler has written, it "flew in the face of Quaker practice."51 Still, Gospel Order Improved did not immediately put Keith at odds with the Public Friends. In fact, the Public Friends agreed to consider Keith's proposals, despite the fact that they contradicted much of Philadelphia Quaker custom.52

The event that sparked what is now known as the Keithian controversy occurred in 1691, when another Public Friend, William Stockdale, challenged Keith in public. Whereas Stockdale argued that Inner Light was sufficient to bring salvation, Keith insisted on the importance of the scriptures and the historical Jesus Christ. By 1692 the escalating feud between Keith and Stockdale had turned into a feud between Keith and the rest of the Ministerial Assembly. By March of that year, Keith had founded his own Meeting in Philadelphia. He and his followers referred to themselves

50. Ibid., vi.
52. Ibid., 436–37.
as Christian Quakers. In June of the same year, the twenty-eight Public Friends condemned both Keith and Stockdale and “withdrew Keith’s thirty-year standing in the ministry.” In September the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting confirmed the Assembly’s condemnation and disowned Keith.

Keith did not stay much longer in Philadelphia. In 1693 he continued to meet with the Christian Quakers, and he printed a series of tracts attacking the orthodox Quakers. It was during this time that he arranged for the printing of the *Exhortation*. In February 1694 Keith left Philadelphia for London, where he would soon be disowned by the London Yearly Meeting. He would not return to Pennsylvania until 1702, and by then Keith would be a missionary for the Church of England.

After its composition on October 18, 1693, the *Exhortation and Caution to Friends concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes* was printed by William Bradford in New York. Bradford had been the official printer for the Philadelphia Quakers until 1692, when he sided with Keith during the schism and was imprisoned by the orthodox Quakers. By 1693 he was employed as the official printer of the New York colony and continued to print pro-Keithian tracts. The *Exhortation* was one of the first texts Bradford printed in New York, and at least one copy made its way across the Atlantic, where it eventually came into the hands of the Friends’ Library in London.

It is important—and curious—that the Christian Quakers chose to print the *Exhortation* instead of circulating it in handwritten form. Circulating handwritten texts was common practice at the time, and the Germantowners had used this method to distribute their 1688 protest. Printing was more difficult, and it required organization, good connections, and funding. Since the authors of the *Exhortation* had never taken their writing to the printing press before, it is reasonable to assume that the decision to print the *Exhortation* had more to do with Keith and his relationship to Bradford than it did with Keith’s followers. So though the group of nonelite Quakers who gathered under Keith’s leadership was responsible for the ideas expressed in

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53. Ibid., 447.


56. This copy is now in the Huntington Library. Bradford’s New York location was determined by Evans in *American Bibliography*.
the Exhortation, it was Keith and Bradford who were acquainted with the Quaker cultural practice of using the printing press to incite controversy. In his thirty years as a Quaker, Keith printed close to one hundred tracts. These texts, which were written between 1665 and the mid-1690s, when he converted to Anglicanism, followed specific cultural patterns: some were intra-Quaker texts, which can be identified by their rhetorical flourishes and effusive introductions, like Keith’s 1665 “A salutation of dear and tender love to the seed of God arising in Aberdeen in two epistles.”57 Others were educational, like the 1690 “Plain short catechism for children & youth, that may be serviceable to such others, who need to be constructed in the first principles and grounds of the Christian religion.”58 But the majority of Keith’s printed works can be categorized as Quaker apologies or polemics. These tracts are easily identified by their titles. Examples include “The nature of Christianity in the true light asserted. In opposition to antichristianism, darkness, confusion, & sin-pleasing doctrines” and “Truths defence, or, The pretended examination by John Alexander of Leith of the principles of those (called Quakers) falsely termed by him Jesuitico-Quakerism, re-examined and confuted.” Keith churned texts like these out at a faster rate when he felt his principles or beliefs had come under attack.

William Bradford, like Keith, had been acculturated in a contentious political environment. As the apprentice to the Quaker printer Andrew Sowle in London, Bradford would have learned how to avoid being caught by royal censors enforcing the Licensing Act of 1662. The act, which was supervised Sir Roger L’Estrange, who “actually relished rooting out unlicensed printers,” lapsed in 1679 (though it was reinstated again from 1685 to 1693), but it made the Quaker printing business into a clandestine and intricate affair. Quakers became adept at getting their “Truth” out despite an oppressive system of censorship, and Quaker printers became skilled and wily figures who developed methods of skirting English authorities.59

William Bradford brought these skills with him to Pennsylvania, where he was invited by William Penn to be the colony’s sole printer. He arrived

in Pennsylvania in 1685 eager for work, but he found that the situation in Pennsylvania was not as ripe for printing as he had hoped: though the external constraints of a royal censorship were absent, the leading Quakers of Philadelphia were often distrustful of Bradford and his printing press.60 This may have been a result of their newfound position of governmental authority: though Quakers were a small and often oppressed minority in London, they held far more political power in Penn’s Pennsylvania colony. Perhaps as a result of this new political arrangement, the leading Quakers in Philadelphia were unsure how to relate to a press that they themselves controlled.

The relationship between Bradford and the ruling Quakers only worsened in 1692, when Bradford began to print pamphlets for George Keith. As the relationship between Keith and the ruling Philadelphia Quakers came to a head and Keith was disowned by the Philadelphia Meeting, Bradford sided with Keith and published a number of pamphlets for Keith’s supporters, the Christian Quakers. In 1692 and 1693, Keith had seventeen polemical tracts printed by William Bradford.61 This output was in marked contrast to Keith’s printing record in the five years preceding the schism, when Keith had two texts or fewer printed per year.

During the Quaker schism of 1692–93, both Keith and Bradford used their experiences in the Old World to guide their decisions in the New. As David Fraser has written, “Controversialists worth their salt know the best way to challenge the Establishment is to control a printing press.”62 With the continued support of William Bradford, who later wrote that he never recovered the costs he incurred printing Keithian tracts, Keith was able to use the printing press much as he had in the Old World. But in Philadelphia there was a catch: unlike England and Scotland, where Quakers united against an established “other,” the Pennsylvania colony was ruled by Quakers. As a result, the skills Keith had developed as a Quaker controversialist were turned against the orthodox Quakers. Starting in 1692, Keith’s printed works held titles such as “New-England’s spirit of persecution transmitted to Pennsilvania, and the pretended Quaker found persecuting the true Christian-Quaker” and “The heresie and hatred which has falsly charged upon the innocent justly returned upon the guilty. Giving some brief and impartial account of the most material passages of a late dispute in writing,

60. Green, “The Book Trade in the Middle Colonies,” 201–2.
61. Ibid., 209.
that hath passed at Philadelphia betwixt John Delavall and George Keith."63

The Exhortation was printed around the same time as these texts, and all three fed the same purpose: to attack the orthodox Quakers with as much verbal venom as possible.

To return to one of the central questions of this essay, what did it mean that the Exhortation was printed and the “Germantown Protest” was not? And how did the politics of printing affect the Quaker debate on slavery in the late seventeenth century? Though influence is difficult to quantify, the Germantown petition probably had a more significant effect on the orthodox Meetings in Philadelphia than the Exhortation did. Though both the “Germantown Protest” and the Exhortation failed in their stated objective to end Quaker slavery, at least three Quaker Meetings read and discussed the “Germantown Protest”: the Abington Monthly Meeting, the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, and the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. All three Meetings left inscriptions on the original text, describing the reasons for the protest’s rejection. But perhaps more important, the existence of the Exhortation in the first place is evidence of the continued circulation of the ideas presented in the Germantown petition.

The Exhortation, meanwhile, was not intended for sober consideration: it was part of a one-sided print war that George Keith was waging against the orthodox Quakers in Philadelphia. Unlike the Germantown petition, which the Germantown Meeting submitted appropriately to the Quaker hierarchy of Meetings, the Exhortation played a much different role in Philadelphia and Quaker politics: written and printed in the midst of the Keithian controversy, it was never formally submitted for consideration at any Quaker Meeting. There is no record of any response to the Exhortation, and it was never mentioned in the minutes of any of the Quaker Meetings in Philadelphia. This evidence suggests that the Exhortation was not given formal consideration by the orthodox Friends in Pennsylvania. In fact, it may have had a negative influence on the antislavery cause. As J. William Frost has written, “Reforms espoused by Keith, such as freeing slaves or requiring a confession of faith before membership, were now beyond the pale of discussion. . . . The Quaker canon of beliefs on all important issues

63. George Keith, “New-England’s spirit of persecution transmitted to Pennsyl
   vania,” and “The heresie and hatred,” Early American Imprints, ser. 1, nos. 621 and 642.
was established.” With the publication of the *Exhortation* outside the orthodox community of Friends, antislavery based on moral grounds was deemed too divisive an issue.

After the Keithian controversy, the arguments developed in the “Germantown Protest” and the *Exhortation* vanished from the official Quaker conversation about slavery for over two decades. In the last four years of the seventeenth century, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting resumed its discussion of perpetual bondage, but the terms of debate were fundamentally altered. In 1696 the Yearly Meeting recorded that “several Papers have been read relating to the keeping and bringing in of Negroes.” Most of these papers have disappeared from the historical record, but Cadwalader Morgan’s 1696 letter still exists. Morgan echoed Fox’s concerns about the Quaker family in *Gospel Family-Order*, but he lacked Fox’s evangelizing impulse. He feared that if he purchased a slave he might “have a bad one of them, that must be Corrected, Or would Run away, Or when I went from home & Leave him with a woman or Maid, and he Should desire or Seek to committ Wickedness.”

Morgan’s sentiments, along with those of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, were representative of a new strain of antislavery thought in trans-Atlantic Quakerism. This strain built on Fox’s fear of corruption in the slave-owning Quaker household while minimizing or ignoring Fox’s evangelizing impulse. The implication was that Quakers would be better off without slaves, not that slaves would be better off free, a sharp contrast to the humanitarian-based antislavery arguments of the “Germantown Protest” and the *Exhortation*. And though the ideas in the two first antislavery documents did not die—their influence can be seen in John Hepburn’s 1715 text, *The American Defence of the Christian Golden Rule*, for example—they disappeared from debate in the orthodox Meeting for decades.

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