

Sarah Mapps Douglass and Sojourner Truth: Intersections of Religion, Race, Gender and Social Class

Stephen W. Angell
Earlham School of Religion, USA

Abstract

The lives and witness of Black American Quaker women are far too little known, both in academic scholarship and in the broader society. Through fine-grained comparison and contrast of the lives of two nineteenth-century Black Quaker women, Sojourner Truth—closely associated with Progressive Friends—and Sarah Mapps Douglass—closely associated with Orthodox Friends—this essay partially remedies that lack, while deeply rooting both women firmly in their varying contexts of social class, race, gender and caste. It also considers the ways that Douglass and Truth were remembered by male observers during an era in which exceptional women often seemed to be rendered as honorary men. It moves toward a conclusion that sets forth possible new research questions relating to Black Quaker women in the nineteenth century.

Keywords

Sojourner Truth, Sarah Mapps Douglass, Progressive Friends, National Negro Conventions, African free schools, Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, Institute of Colored Youth

Introduction

This essay takes as its springboard an incident in the life of Black Quaker teacher and intellectual Sarah Mapps Douglass, in which a White Quaker inquired whether Douglass was a housekeeper. It proceeds to investigate many issues related to religion, race, gender and social class, through the lives of two Black women closely associated with Quakers, Douglass and Sojourner Truth. After an exploration of Douglass's and Truth's Quaker connections, the essay examines the contours of Black employment in the early nineteenth-century United States, and debates within the Black community as related to employment and vocation. It

then applies this analysis more closely to the lives of Douglass and Truth, focusing especially on the year (1833–34) when Douglass worked as a teacher in New York City. The essay briefly analyses the later career of Douglass and the family ties of both Douglass and Truth, and also considers the ways that Douglass and Truth were remembered by male observers during an era in which exceptional women often seemed to be rendered as honorary men. It moves toward a conclusion that invites new research questions through an exploration of Truth's and Douglass's differing assessments of Quakerism.

Sarah Douglass's Enlightening Correspondence

On 14 January 1839, White abolitionist Sarah Grimke, then living in New Jersey, wrote an urgent missive to her African American abolitionist friend, Sarah Mapps Douglass, a resident of Philadelphia, a region of Pennsylvania's Delaware Valley. The highly educated Douglass was a renaissance scholar, who was extremely well versed in both the humanities and sciences. As a young woman, she had already become an accomplished teacher, poet, essayist, letter writer and watercolourist. In later years she completed the courses necessary for a medical degree and then delivered public lectures in anatomy.

An English Friend, Elizabeth Pease, had contacted Grimke soliciting information regarding 'the prejudice against colour which exists in this country' [i.e. the United States].¹ Grimke wanted to reply to Pease with data about race prejudice among Quakers. Both Grimke and Douglass had complicated relationships with the Orthodox branch of the Religious Society of Friends. Grimke, a South Carolinian transplant, had recently experienced the abrupt termination of her ten-year membership in the Society. Since she had attended the wedding of her Quaker sister Angelina to a non-Quaker abolitionist, Theodore Weld, Grimke understandably surmised that her involvement in the radical interdenominational movement of abolitionists was the basis of the hostility to her and to Angelina, who was disowned also. Douglass, despite inheriting a lifelong devotion to Quakerism from her Quaker-inclined mother, Grace Douglass, had been unyieldingly excluded from membership in the Society, as had her mother. Furthermore, both Grace and Sarah Douglass were subjected to segregated seating when they worshipped with Friends. No matter how Quakerly the Grimkes and the Douglasses were, Delaware Valley Quakers had seemed determined to keep them on—or outside—the margins of their Society.

Prior to the 1839 letter, Grimke had evidently conversed thoroughly on the subject of race prejudice among Friends with Douglass, because her letter to the latter listed a series of incidents regarding which she wished to have a written

1 Sarah Grimke to Sarah Douglass, 01/14/1839, in Barnes, G. H. and Dumond, D. L. (eds), *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld, and Sarah Grimke, 1822–1844*, New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934, II, p. 744.

account from Douglass. She desired ‘the facts whatever they may be relative to the “bench for colored persons”’. Recalling that the 33-year-old Douglass had lived for one year (August 1833 to August 1834) in New York, Grimke also requested that Douglass ‘state the circumstances that occurred in N.Y. both to thy mother and thyself’.²

Douglass’s reply is not extant, but undoubtedly she furnished the information that Sarah Grimke requested, because Grimke’s letter to Elizabeth Pease three months later, on 10 April 1839, contained detailed information about the interactions of the Douglass family with Philadelphia and New York Quakers, as outlined in Grimke’s letter to Douglass. Here we will be primarily concerned with the Douglass’s interactions with Quakers in New York. Two years previously, Grace Douglass had attempted to worship with Quakers in New York when she attended the Women’s Convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Sarah Douglass recounted her mother’s experience:

Mother does not recollect distinctly the circumstances that occurred at the New York Mtg. but thinks this is the substance. After she had been in Mtg. sometime a Friend came in & sat by her, & asked her who she lived with. Mother said she did not live with any one. The Fd. then said that the colored people sat up stairs ‘as Fds. do not like to sit by thy color’ & added she had no objection herself to sit by her, but that when she came again she had better sit up stairs. She did not go to the Mtg. again; she was attending the Women’s Convention in N.Y. 1837 & was a stranger there, it was the first time she attempted to go to Fds. Mtg. there.³

In that letter to Pease, Sarah Douglass also recounted her own experience as she had sat in worship with Quakers in New York, probably in 1833, when she had just begun her employment as a teacher in New York’s Free African School:

I had been attending meeting one month when a friend accosted me thus, ‘Does thee go out ahouse cleaning’. I looked at her with astonishment, my eyes filled with tears & I answered no. ‘What does thee do then’ ‘I teach school’, ‘Oh then thee’s better off’. Judge what were my feelings, a stranger in a strange land, think of the time, the place & this the first salutation I received in a house consecrated to Him. I wept during the whole of that mtg. & for many succeeding sabbaths & I believe they were not the tears of wounded pride alone.⁴

In 1840, Elizabeth Pease published a pamphlet in England,⁵ incorporating Douglass’s account of segregated seating in Quaker meeting houses, and

2 Sarah Grimke to Sarah Douglass, 01/14/1839, in Barnes and Dumond (eds), *Letters of*, II, p. 744.

3 Sterling, D. (ed.), *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*, New York: Norton, 1984, p. 131.

4 Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters*, p. 131.

5 Pease, E. (ed.), *Society of Friends in the United States: their views of the anti-slavery question, and treatment of the people of colour, compiled from original correspondence*, Darlington, England: John Wilson, 1840.

the deleterious effect on people of colour who attended those meetings.⁶ However, Pease's pamphlet did not include the fact that Douglass was queried about her occupation by a New York Quaker, and we know that part of the New York meeting story only because Sarah Grimke's letter to Pease survives. This present essay analyses that observation from Douglass more deeply, exploring what opening that may provide us in respect to the interactions of race, gender, and social and economic class within the African American community, and in its confrontation with White American society in the middle Atlantic region of New York and Pennsylvania during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Historiography of Truth and Douglass and Their Quaker Involvement

The lives and witness of these two Black women Friends have seldom been considered in conjuncture. Quaker and non-Quaker historians have often portrayed the lifelong faithful Quaker witness of Sarah Mapps Douglass and the racial prejudice and discriminatory actions that she confronted from White Quakers. Her extensive career in education and her scholarly and literary pursuits have also been worthy subjects of historical examination (see Table 1).⁷ On the other hand, the numerous Quaker connections of Sojourner Truth, especially her growing identification with Progressive Quakers in her elder years, have found a place in the writings of her non-Quaker biographers.⁸ Truth merited a brief mention in historian Henry Cadbury's 1936 article on Black Quakers. He alleged that Truth was not a Friend, yet was 'particularly well known' by Quakers; there was no other mention of Truth in any survey of nineteenth-century Black Quakers published before 2011 (see Table 2).⁹

6 Twenty-first century scholars have suggested that the responses to Pease's pamphlet were sparse, mostly 'a mixture of silence and denial', according to Ryan P. Jordan. Margaret Hope Bacon commented that Pease's 'pamphlet did not apparently occasion wide dispute'. Jordan, R. P., *Slavery and the Meetinghouse: the Quakers and the abolitionist dilemma, 1820–1865*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007, pp. 76–78, quotation on p. 77; Bacon, M. H., *Sarah Mapps Douglass: Faithful Attender of Quaker Meeting: view from the back bench*, Philadelphia, PA: Quaker Press of FGC, 2003, pp. 20–21.

7 See, e.g. McDaniel, D. and Julye, V., *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans, and the myth of racial justice*, Philadelphia, PA: Quaker Press of Friends General Conference, 2009, pp. 75–77, 195–97; Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse*, pp. 72–73, 76–80; Bacon, *Sarah Mapps Douglass*; Ives, K., *Black Quakers: brief biographies*, Chicago, IL: Progressiv Publishr, 1991, pp. 43–62.

8 Washington, W., *Sojourner Truth's America*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009, pp. 151, 251, passim; Mabee, C. and Mabee Newhouse, S., *Sojourner Truth: slave, prophet, legend*, New York: New York University Press, 1995, p. 241; Painter, N. I., *Sojourner Truth*, p. 240.

9 Cadbury, H. J., 'Negro Membership in the Society of Friends', *Journal of Negro History* 21 (April 1936), pp. 208–10. General treatments of nineteenth-century Black Quakers that entirely omit Truth include: Drake, T., *Quakers and Slavery in America*, New Haven, CT: Yale

In 2011, I provided brief portraits and excerpts from writings or speeches for both Truth and Douglass, in *Black Fire: African American Quakers on Spirituality and Human Rights*, edited by Hal Weaver, Paul Kriese and myself.¹⁰ More recently, I have explored the religious identities, and participation in literary and abolitionist networks, by both Truth and Douglass in a volume edited by Robynne Rogers Healey and Carole Dale Spencer.¹¹ This present essay attempts to further develop the case that historians can present a fuller, more nuanced portrait of early nineteenth-century Black Quaker women by considering Truth and Douglass together, as they favoured differing branches of Friends, identified with different social classes, and held diverse understandings of many matters pertaining both to Friends and to the wider world.

This present essay also makes full use of the extensive scholarly explorations of the experiences of early nineteenth-century African Americans in the states of the American North, using social historical methodology.¹² Accordingly, this essay is the first work of scholarship to attempt to integrate a thorough account of both Truth's and Douglass's social historical contexts with a comparative treatment of Truth's and Douglass's vocational aspirations and achievements, especially as they interacted with Quakers. A variety of sources has been utilised to illuminate how Truth's and Douglass's gender was understood by their contemporaries, and by scholars who have written about them.

University Press, 1950; Ives, *Black Quakers*; Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse*; McDaniel and Julye, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship*; and Cazden, E., 'Quakers, Slavery, Anti-slavery, and Race', in Angell, S. W. and Dandelion, P. (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 347–62. Chuck Fager noticed the presence of Truth at Progressive Friends' meetings and refrained from generalising as to whether she was a Progressive Friend: *Remaking Friends: how Progressive Friends changed Quakerism and helped save America*, Durham, NC: Kimo Press, 2014, p. 43; *Angels of Progress: a documentary history of the Progressive Friends: Radical Quakers in a turbulent America*, Durham, NC: Kimo Press, p. 221.

10 Angell, S. W., 'The Early Period', in Weaver, Jr, H. D., Kriese, P. and Angell, S. W. (eds), *Black Fire: African American Quakers on spirituality and human rights*, Philadelphia, PA: Quaker Press of FGC, 2011, pp. 21–30.

11 Angell, S. W., 'Vocation, Religious Identity, and the Abolitionist Networks of Sarah Mapps Douglass and Sojourner Truth', in Healey, R. R. and Spencer, C. (eds), *Gender and Quakerism in Transition, 1800–1920: finding new voices*, University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, forthcoming.

12 See, e.g. Nash, G. B., *Forging Freedom: the formation of Philadelphia's Black community, 1720–1840*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988; Winch, J., *A Gentleman of Color: the life of James Forten*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; Dunbar, E., *A Fragile Freedom: African American women and emancipation in the antebellum city*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008; Harris, L., *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626–1863*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003; Jones Lapsansky, E., "'Since They Got Those Separate Churches": Afro-Americans and racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia', *American Quarterly* 32 (Spring 1980), pp. 54–78; Fagan Yellin, J. and Van Horne, J. C. (eds), *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: women's political culture in antebellum America*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Table 1. Quaker historians' assessment of Sarah Mapps Douglass

Key: **bold print** signifies works by historians of Quaker involvement in race relations; *italics* represents a biography of Douglass by a historian of Quaker involvement in race relations.

Cadbury 1936	Takes note of her faithful attendance at Quaker meetings, her 60-year teaching career, her anti-slavery work (pp. 192–94).
Drake 1950	She protested separate seating for Black people in the Arch Street Quaker meeting house in Philadelphia (p. 178).
Ives 1991	Takes note of her decades of teaching and reprints primary source documents related to the discrimination she experienced in Friends meetings in Philadelphia (pp. 49–59).
<i>Bacon 2003</i>	An illuminating biography featuring balanced treatment of Douglass's teaching, scholarship, anti-slavery work, community commitments, family life and protests against racial discrimination among Friends.
Jordan 2007	Thorough description and analysis of Douglass's protests against racial discrimination in Friends' meetings.
McDaniel and Julye 2009	'Lifelong activist in the African American community of Philadelphia'; 'regularly attended Friends' meetings in the city'; takes note of her anti-slavery work, her teaching career, her other philanthropic work (pp. 75–77); and her protests against racially segregated seating in Friends' meetings (pp. 195–97).
Angell 2011	Educator, author, abolitionist; eloquent opponent of racial prejudice wherever it manifested itself, even among Friends
Cazden 2013	Notes Douglass's complaints about segregated seating in Friends' meeting houses (p. 354).

Note: historians of Quaker involvement in race relations have all recognised that inclusion of the life and witness of Sarah Mapps Douglass is a vital part of narrating and analysing the history of American Quaker attitudes and behaviours toward race in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

Sources: Margaret Hope Bacon, *Sarah Mapps Douglass: Faithful Attender of Quaker Meeting: View from the Back Bench*, Philadelphia, PA: Quaker Press of FGC, 2003; Thomas Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950; Ryan P. Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse: the Quakers and the abolitionist dilemma, 1820–1865*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007; Donna McDaniel and Vanessa Julye, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice*, Philadelphia, PA: Quaker Press of Friends General Conference, 2009; Kenneth Ives, *Black Quakers: Brief Biographies*, Chicago, IL: Progressiv Publishr, 1991; Henry J. Cadbury, 'Negro Membership in the Society of Friends', *Journal of Negro History* 21(April 1936): 151–213; Stephen W. Angell, 'The Early Period', in Harold D. Weaver, Jr., Paul Kriese and Stephen W. Angell (eds), *Black Fire: African American Quakers on Spirituality and Human Rights*, Philadelphia, PA: Quaker Press of FGC, 2011, pp. 1–43; Elizabeth Cazden, 'Quakers, Slavery, Anti-slavery, and Race', in Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 347–62.

Table 2. Biographers' and Quaker historians' assessment of Sojourner truth

Key: **bold print** signifies works by historians of Quaker involvement in race relations; *italics* signifies works by biographers of Sojourner Truth.

Cadbury 1936	Though not a Friend, Truth was particularly well known to Friends; an itinerant preacher of a remarkable kind, she dressed in a Quaker garb and used Quaker language (pp. 208–10).
Drake 1950	Truth is not mentioned.
Ives 1991	Truth is not mentioned.
<i>Mabee and Newhouse 1995</i>	'Although Truth sometimes wore Quaker-style garb, and was in more significant ways more influenced by Quakers, and may informally be called a Progressive Friend herself, still she is not known ever to have joined a regular Friends Meeting' (p. 241).
<i>Painter 1996</i>	'Truth had long consorted with spiritualists in the persons of Progressive Friends'. In her seventies, 'their beliefs became increasingly her own', especially their 'tranquil notion of life after death' (p. 240).
Jordan 2007	Truth is not mentioned.
McDaniel and Julye 2008	Truth is not mentioned.
<i>Washington 2009</i>	Notes Truth's love for the Quakers, especially Progressive Friends; while Progressive Friends had become increasingly ecumenical, non-sectarian and social-justice-oriented, Truth's 'relationship with ... Progressive Friends was as close as she came to a religious affiliation' (pp. 151, 251; quotation on 251).
Angell 2011	States that she always loved the Quakers; assistance received from a Quaker in her self-emancipation noted; observes that the Methodists would let her sing in worship, but most Quakers would not; closeness to Progressive Friends is noted, especially in her later years (pp. 21–22).
Cazden 2013	Truth is not mentioned.

Note: Biographers of Truth have generally been more cognisant than historians of Quaker involvement in race relations of the significance of narrating and analysing possible Quaker dimensions to the life and witness of Sojourner Truth.

Sources: Margaret Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009; Carleton Mabee and Susan Mabee Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend*, New York: New York University Press, 1995; Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*, New York: Norton, 1996; Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse*; McDaniel and Julye, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship*; Ives, *Black Quakers*; Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*; Cadbury, 'Negro Membership in the Society of Friends'; Angell, 'The Early Period', pp. 1–43; Cazden, 'Quakers, Slavery, Anti-slavery, and Race', pp. 347–62.

Was Sojourner Truth a Quaker?

Born into slavery in New York state, Isabella van Wageningen escaped slavery in 1826 with the help of some of her Quaker neighbours, who also assisted her in reclaiming her son Peter through petitioning for his return through New York courts after the child had been illegally sold out of state. Isabella (better known by her later name of Sojourner Truth) never forgot these kindnesses. However, that did not equate to her choice of religious affiliation. In the years immediately after attaining her freedom, the revivalism of the Methodists really touched Isabella's heart. She accounted for her consequent affiliation with the Methodists with the remark that Methodists would let her sing during worship, whereas Quakers would not.¹³ In the 1830s and 1840s, Isabella's spiritual quest led her to close affiliations with the White Methodists (Methodist Episcopal Church), as well as with the Black Methodists (the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church), a new religious movement that went under the name of the Kingdom of Matthias, and the Adventists. Her name change to Sojourner Truth occurred about 1843, during her period of greatest attraction to the Adventists.

She never renounced any of these affiliations. However, from the 1850s onward, while her religious associations were broad ranging, she seemed to make her closest associations with the Progressive Quakers, who are best known for translating their religious beliefs into social and political action.¹⁴ The Progressive Quakers were an offshoot of the Hicksites. In New York state and elsewhere, the Hicksites were mostly composed of rural or small town meetings during the mid-nineteenth century; while not impoverished, the Hicksites generally possessed less wealth than the Orthodox.¹⁵ The Progressive Quakers strongly emphasised social justice issues in their annual meetings, de-emphasised formalities of membership and sought to get rid of eldership and recorded ministry altogether.¹⁶ Historian Nell Painter has characterised the meetings of the Progressive Quakers as a 'mixture of revival, picnic, sing-along, and séance'.¹⁷ While, like Progressive Quakers, Truth espoused a liberal theology, the silent meetings for worship that prevailed among

13 Mabee and Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth*, pp. 219–20.

14 'Sojourner's relationship with ... Progressive Friends was as close as she came to a religious affiliation' (Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, p. 251); see also Mabee and Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth*, p. 241. Painter also sees Truth as closest to Progressive Friends toward the end of her life, but dates that transition later (circa 1870): Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, p. 240.

15 Doherty, R., *The Hicksite Separation: a sociological analysis of religious schism in early nineteenth century America*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1967, pp. 56–65; Ingle, H. L., *Quakers in Conflict*, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1988, pp. 39, 46–51.

16 Fager, C., *Remaking Friends*, pp. 39–40, 43–49.

17 Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, p. 143.

most Friends in the first half of the nineteenth century, and among most liberal Friends after mid-century, had little appeal for her.¹⁸

Was Sarah Mapps Douglass a Quaker?

According to a posthumous sketch of Douglass by her long-time associate Fanny Jackson Coppin, Sarah Mapps Douglass ‘adhered to the tenets of Friends and always attended their meetings’.¹⁹ This was a very careful statement, one that emphasised Douglass’s closeness to Quakers without claiming for her what she perhaps never attained, membership in a Quaker meeting.

Sarah Douglass had a long family association with Quakers, as did her mother Grace Bustill Douglass. However, Grace was discouraged from applying for membership, and it seems unlikely that Sarah herself ever became a member.²⁰ The fraught relationship between Black women and Delaware Valley Quakers likely predated the involvement of either Sarah or her mother with the sect. While in September 1796 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting approved a minute that applications for membership in their Society should be acted upon without regard to race, in practice their fears of interracial sex caused them to discourage membership applications from African Americans and to delay acting upon those that persevering Black women sought to submit.²¹ There were at least two such instances in the mid-1790s. In May 1796, the monthly meeting in Rahway, New Jersey, decided ‘that it is right to proceed very cautiously’ with the membership application from ‘Cynthia Miers, a Mulatto Woman’; Miers was not admitted to membership until October, after the yearly meeting approved its minute. More shrouded in mystery is the case of ‘Hannah Burrows, a Mulatto Woman who has, for some time past, made her appearance in [Friends] Meetings as a preacher or teacher’. A multitude of weighty White male Quakers in Philadelphia, including James Pemberton, Jonathan Evans, Henry Drinker and David Bacon, met with Burrows in March 1795 as Burrows may have been considering membership. After

18 For more, see Angell, ‘The Early Period’, in Weaver, Kriese and Angell (eds), *Black Fire*, pp. 21–27; and Angell, ‘Vocation, Religious Identity, and the Abolitionist Networks of Sarah Mapps Douglass and Sojourner Truth’, in Healey and Spencer (eds), *Gender and Quakerism in Transition, 1800–1920*, pp. 79–101.

19 Jackson-Coppin, F., *Reminiscences of School Life, and Hints on Teaching*, Philadelphia, PA: AME Book Concern, 1913, pp. 148–49.

20 McDaniel, D. and Julye, V., *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship*, pp. 195–97; Bacon, *Sarah Mapps Douglass*, pp. 2–7.

21 Letter from James Pemberton to James Phillips, 18 November 1784, The Gilder Lehrman Collection, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc04237>, accessed 28/12/2022. McDaniel and Julye, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship*, pp. 190–92; Cadbury, ‘Negro Membership’, pp. 173–76; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, pp. 180, 191.

that meeting, there is no indication of Burrows being received into membership nor is there an indication of her continuing any association with Friends.²²

Despite such apparent rebuffs, Douglass was part of a warmly supportive community of Black elite Philadelphians who had many significant ties to Quakers. Her association with the large family of sailmaker and Black entrepreneur James Forten was especially important to her throughout her life; Forten's daughter Harriet Forten Purvis had especially close connections with Quakers. Douglass agreed with her mother Grace Douglass that 'very many of our people inclined to Friends' mode of worship', possibly including some Fortens like Harriet Purvis, but that White Friends' 'unchristian conduct kept them out'.²³ Some Quakers from outside the Delaware Valley area concurred with Douglass on this point. For example, after an 1841 visit, English Friend Joseph Sturge stated that Philadelphia was a metropolis of prejudice against colour, of Anti-Abolition feeling among Friends, as well as others'.²⁴

After the Hicksite-Orthodox separation, the Douglasses associated with Orthodox Quakers. Douglass's urban world of Philadelphia was one where Orthodox Quakerism (as opposed to their Hicksite rivals) predominated, and in general terms, the mid-century Orthodox Quakers were more wealthy, urban and intellectually sophisticated than the Hicksites.²⁵ Sarah enjoyed worship rooted in silence, and she was extremely knowledgeable about the Bible and was well read in Quaker literature. In contrast to Truth, she espoused a more conservative Christian theology (but not necessarily evangelical).²⁶

At her request, Sarah Mapps Douglass's papers were destroyed upon her death. Accordingly, the sources for assessing her remarkable life are both limited and scattered.²⁷

22 The quotation relating to Burrows is from Forman Crane, E. (ed.), *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker: the life cycle of an eighteenth-century woman*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, pp. 145–46. In regard to Miers, see Cadbury, 'Negro Membership', pp. 173–74.

23 Quotation is from Bacon, *Sarah Mapps Douglass*, p. 21. See also Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, p. 116; and Bacon, M. H. *But One Race: The Life of Robert Purvis*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007, pp. 67, 90.

24 Cadbury, 'Negro Membership', p. 180; see also Perkins, L. M., *Fanny Jackson Coppin and the Institute for Colored Youth, 1865–1902*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1987, pp. 76–78.

25 Ingle, H. L., *Quakers in Conflict: the Hicksite reformation*, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1988, pp. 17–24, 31; Doherty, R., *The Hicksite Separation: a sociological analysis of religious schism in early nineteenth century America*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1967, pp. 33–50.

26 For more, see Angell, 'The Early Period: Sarah Mapps Douglass', in Weaver, Kriese and Angell (eds), *Black Fire*, pp. 27–30; and Angell, 'Vocation, Religious Identity', in Healey and Spencer (eds), *Gender and Quakerism*, pp. 79–101.

27 Information courtesy of Celia Caust-Ellenbogen, Swarthmore College.

Salutations and Quaker Hospitality

It would be helpful to know more about how early nineteenth-century Quakers greeted newcomers to their midst.²⁸ As a reader of Douglass's reflections, one wonders why enquiries about her job status did not come until some significant conversation on other topics had already taken place.

The White Quaker woman did not question Douglass about job status in an open-ended fashion, which would have allowed Douglass to volunteer immediately that she was a school teacher. Instead, she inquired whether Douglass worked in what was the most common occupation for African American women in the first half of the nineteenth century, domestic service, which involved cleaning houses, washing clothes and cooking. Probably her interrogator desired to hire a household worker. It seems likely that some African American women who associated with Quakers did hire themselves out for domestic service. One such person who lived in New York during the 1830s was Isabella Van Wagenen.

Douglass, Truth and the Employment of Black Women in the Early Nineteenth Century

The contrasts and similarities between Sarah Mapps Douglass and Sojourner Truth illuminate both the social and gender complexities *within* Black communities, and the equally complex relationships *between* women and men who occupied opposite racial roles within society. Douglass was an intellectual, and an educator throughout her life.²⁹ Sojourner Truth was (roughly in order of vocational discovery) a housekeeper, a preacher and lecturer, and an entrepreneur and businesswoman who marketed her life narrative and photographic portraits of herself.³⁰

Most Black people in this era found themselves—as Truth originally did—in unskilled, low-paying jobs. African American men generally were more highly paid than African American women but African American women generally had steadier employment, so their income was crucial for Black families.

The most common jobs for Black women were live-in servants, self-employed laundresses or cooks. In the eyes of both Black people and White people, these

28 Neither historian Tom Hamm nor I can readily think of nineteenth-century sources that address this issue. Tom writes, 'Other than references to dinner invitations, I don't recall anything. Doubtless practices would have varied between urban and rural areas' (private communication with Tom Hamm, 30 July 2022). Visitors would have had greater expectations of hospitality from Friends in rural areas since there they had few or no other options.

29 Bacon, *Sarah Mapps Douglass*, is the most comprehensive source of information on Douglass's life.

30 The best source for exploring Douglass's engagement with vocation and employment is Painter, *Sojourner Truth*. But see also Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*.

jobs were not very far removed from slavery. Black people's employment was often accompanied by formal documents of indenture, which, on the one hand, rendered the service required even closer to slavery, but, on the other hand, offered Black labourers some protection from being kidnapped and sold into slavery.³¹ The demand in the Northern states for live-in servants was very high, and the supply was scarce.³² Black women sometimes exercised their agency in acts of resistance to their White employers. In 1822, White Philadelphian Quaker Deborah Norris Logan discharged Maggy Jones, 'a colored woman' whom she had employed as a servant for three years, on the grounds that she had become 'too warm in her place and very impertinent in her remarks'.³³

One to two per cent of the African American community in the 1830s were employed as preachers, teachers or business owners; the latter operated a great variety of businesses.³⁴ The pressure from White workers to exclude Black workers from the skilled trades was strong and often successful.³⁵ Historian Christopher Densmore, attempting to discern White Quaker orientations toward the employment of Black workers, has tentatively concluded that, while White Quakers were often committed to educating African Americans, they 'do not appear to have been forward in providing advanced employment opportunities' to the African Americans living in their midst.³⁶ In other words, the White Quaker woman who asked if Douglass was a housekeeper probably had a typical White Quaker attitude toward suitable employment for African American women.

31 Curry, L., *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800–1850*, pp. 200–01; Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom*, pp. 36–43; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, pp. 79, 98: 'The compression of free black men and women into a limited range of occupations in antebellum New York was a legacy of slavery... The unskilled, low-status, low-wage jobs at which most free blacks worked devalued them as much in the eyes of whites as did the legacy of slavery'.

32 Howe, D. W., *What Hath God Wrought: the transformation of America, 1815–1848*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 555.

33 Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom*, p. 44. Dunbar summarises the experiences of Maggy Jones and other Philadelphian Black female servants as follows: By continuing 'to bend and transform the rules of conduct, ... they also manipulated their working environment and employers, making better lives for their families' (p. 47). For more on Deborah Norris Logan, see Williams, A., 'Deborah Norris Logan: historian, diarist, republican', <http://www.inherownright.org/spotlight/biographical-profiles/feature/deborah-norris-logan-historian-diarist-republican>, accessed 05/12/2022.

34 Nash, *Forging Freedom*, pp. 149–52; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, pp. 77–78.

35 See, e.g. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, p. 274; Lapsansky, 'Since They Got Those Separate Churches', pp. 54–78, at p. 76.

36 Densmore, C., 'Aim for a Free State and Settle among Quakers: African-American and Quaker parallel communities in Pennsylvania and New Jersey', in Carey, B. and Plank, G. (eds), *Quakers and Abolition*, University of Illinois Press, 2015, pp. 120–34, at p. 126.

Debates Within the Black Community on Vocation

National Negro Conventions in the 1840s and 1850s often debated the proper scope of vocation and employment for Black women and men. As far as Black male employment went, the delegates sought ways to increase the numbers of African Americans in the skilled trades. However, viable plans were not often readily discernible. This would change somewhat after the civil war. Different delegates often had different emphases. Martin Delany—and, to some degree, Frederick Douglass—viewed service jobs such as waiters, barbers and domestic workers to be degrading. They believed that African Americans should seek more elevated professions. However, this was made much more difficult by opposition from White people, who sometimes displaced or actively and violently drove African Americans out of professions in which the latter had flourished.³⁷

By her actions and example as a schoolteacher, and the strong suggestions contained in the New York story that began this article, we can surmise that Sarah Mapps Douglass inclined toward Delany's arguments. On the other hand, Scottish-trained African American physician James McCune Smith defended the inherent dignity of all free labour. Smith believed that one could find the potential for self-respect in any job.³⁸ Truth likely would have agreed with Smith.

These conventions featured heavily gendered discourse. The male delegates tended to emphasise the degrading nature of service work for men but were generally willing to tolerate it for African American women. Delany was an exception to this trend, deploring the degrading nature of service work for African American women also. He declared that he 'would rather receive a telegraphic dispatch that his wife and two children had fallen victims to a loathsome disease, than to hear that they had become servants of any man'.³⁹ In this veiled allusion to frequent sexual oppression and exploitation of Black female domestic workers, Delany was probably not wrong, at least to the degree that we can discern the relevant experience of the youthful Isabella (Isabella/Truth conspicuously declined to comment on such matters, so the available evidence is circumstantial).⁴⁰

White abolitionists struggled with their own White privilege and racial prejudice, and often were unable to contribute meaningfully to these debates, preferring to ignore them despite their importance to the free Black communities in the North. (Truth be told, there was an enormous amount to do on the anti-slavery side of the era's discussions on race. In many ways, however, the racially suffused caste/class issues that arose during this period have proven more intractable.)⁴¹

37 Truth discusses this phenomenon: Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, pp. 258–59.

38 Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, pp. 231–40.

39 Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, pp. 232–33; Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, pp. 71–72.

40 See, e.g. comments on Isabella's involvement in the Kingdom of Matthias in Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, pp. 51–60.

41 Reasons for this are explored in Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, pp. 199–201.

Sojourner Truth's Vocation and Employment

Even as Isabella began to make a name for herself as a preacher during the 1830s, she gained income as a housekeeper for a variety of White men in the decade after her self-emancipation in 1826: the Van Wagenens, other wealthy families in the Kingston, New York region, James Latourette, Elijah Pearson, the prophet Matthias, among others.⁴² She supervised the laundry at the Northampton community in the 1840s. She also nursed the sick and was a seamstress there.⁴³

Vocationally, Truth often thought of herself as an itinerant preacher, but it seems doubtful whether preaching produced much, if any, income for her. Truth's marketing of herself through sales of her autobiography and of cards bearing her photographs provided her with some income. She sold these at abolitionist and women's rights conventions. She was able to keep her accounts in her head. Her friends were impressed by 'her business sense and her determination to eliminate her debts'.⁴⁴ Sometimes, when she was unable to work, friends solicited from other friends funds for Truth's subsistence and livelihood.⁴⁵

In her later years, when she needed employment, her White friends sometimes helped her to find employment as a housekeeper.⁴⁶ According to Nell Painter, Truth—especially in her later years—often 'was an honored houseguest who might nonetheless from time to time help out with the housework'.⁴⁷ In 1867, Truth was hired as a teacher; her subject was housekeeping.⁴⁸

Nell Painter noted that '[w]omen like Isabella, who lived with their employers and shared their views, women who remained outside of what would later be called "the black community", mostly disappear from history's view ... Unseen holy women like ... Isabella, who performed household labour and were known more for piety than for wealth or agitation, served as targets of criticism' for prominent male leaders of the African American community such as Martin Delany.⁴⁹

Douglass's One-Year Employment as a Teacher in New York

Douglass, who lived into her seventies, was a lifelong resident of Philadelphia, except for the one year from 1833 to 1834, when accepted a teaching position in New York. So why did she decide to teach in New York in 1833? The short answer: we don't know. But the historical context may provide some clues.

42 Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, pp. 32–60.

43 Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, pp. 158–59.

44 Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, pp. 232.

45 Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, pp. 299–300.

46 Mabee and Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth*, p. 98.

47 Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, p. 181.

48 Hewitt, *Radical Friend*, p. 249.

49 Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, p. 71–72.

African Americans in New York City in the early 1830s organised successfully to pressure the Quaker-dominated board (the New York Manumission Society) of the African Free Schools to fire a White overt racist, anti-slavery eminent educator (Charles Andrews) from the position of principal and to replace him with a Black educator (John Peterson).⁵⁰ More teachers were needed for the increased enrolment, and all but one of the teachers Peterson hired were African American. It was Peterson who hired Douglass at a salary of \$300 per annum.⁵¹ Did she take this position in part because she wanted to support the efforts of the New York Black community for greater control over their own affairs? That seems likely.

While little is known about her experience there, a few possible reasons present themselves as to why Douglass left New York after so short a stay. Support among White people for the African free schools was weak. In reaction to diminished financial support by the New York Common Council, the Manumission Society reduced its own support of the African free schools, agreeing to cover teachers' salaries but not physical maintenance of the schools. In May 1834, the Society sold the school property and transferred management to the New York Public Schools.⁵²

Toward the end of Sarah Mapps Douglass's year of teaching in New York, the life of the African American communities in both New York (July) and Philadelphia (August) were turned upside down by White mobs rampaging through their neighbourhoods, burning their churches and houses, and focusing physical assaults especially on prosperous African Americans (in the case of Philadelphia, actually killing a well-esteemed Black man). White authorities were complicit. In Philadelphia, such White mobs destroying the African American community would recur seven times between 1830 and 1850. The psychological effects were profound; no matter their social class, Black persons, vocations and property were not secure. In New York, White allies were attacked as well, and White abolitionists allowed this violent mob to drive a wedge between themselves and the African American community; they wondered what they could do to placate the mob.⁵³ Perhaps the mob actions of 1834—actions which severely affected the middle-class African American communities in both New York and Philadelphia during the 1830s and 1840s and which historian Emma Lapsansky-Werner has

50 Barbour, H. et al., *Quaker Crosscurrents: three hundred years of Friends in New York meetings*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995, pp. 59, 70–71; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, pp. 142–44.

51 Bacon, *Sarah Mapps Douglass*, p. 10.

52 Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, p. 144.

53 Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 197–201; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, pp. 271–74; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, pp. 433–34; Peterson, C., *Black Gotham: a family history of African Americans in nineteenth-century New York City*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 100–02; Prince, C. E., 'The Great "Riot Year": Jacksonian democracy and patterns of violence in 1834', *Journal of the Early American Republic* 5 (Spring, 1985), pp. 14–15; Lapsansky-Werner, E., *The Black Presence in Pennsylvania: 'making it home'*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania Historical Association, 2001, p. 18.

designated as ‘the nadir’ for Black Philadelphians—brought Douglass to the relative safety of her hometown.⁵⁴

White terrorist incidents are best understood as not random events but as playing a central role in enforcing the American caste system. Historian Isabel Wilkerson comments:

The only way to keep an entire group of sentient beings in an artificially fixed place, beneath all others and beneath their own talents, is with violence and terror, psychological and physical, to preempt resistance before it can be imagined... All that it needs from bystanders is their silent complicity in the evil committed on their behalf.⁵⁵

Sometime during this riotous summer of 1834, Douglass returned home, and her beloved brother Charles, angry at White people’s bigotry and oppression, died of tuberculosis shortly after her return.⁵⁶ To what extent was her return influenced by this family concern? To what extent was her return a response to the lack of hospitality shown toward her by New York’s White Quakers? Was the diminishing support by the White Quaker-dominated Manumission Society of the African free schools a factor in her decision to leave? To what extent was she influenced by the broader community concerns evidenced in such events as the terrifying and destructive riots? If both her city of birth and her city of current residence were beset by such White supremacist dangers, she may have preferred to face these horrors with her family close by. None of our available sources shed light on the effects of all these various events on Douglass’s decision-making.

Sarah Douglass’s Later Teaching Career

In March 1838, after Douglass had been teaching in her own school for four years after her return from New York, she approached the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS) with a request that it take over the management of her school because it was not taking in enough income. The PFASS, founded five years earlier, while Douglass was teaching in New York, was interracial, with African Americans composing about 10 per cent of its membership. Through the 1830s, the PFASS engaged in a wide range of anti-slavery activities, including circulating petitions, boycotting slave-produced goods, assisting self-emancipators and sponsoring anti-slavery fairs. Its membership was drawn largely from the White and Black economic elite. Douglass herself had been active in the PFASS

54 Lapsansky-Werner, *The Black Presence in Pennsylvania*, p. 16.

55 Wilkerson, I., *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent*, New York: Random House, 2020, p. 151.

56 Bacon, *Sarah Mapps Douglass*, pp. 10–11; Angell, ‘The Early Period’, *Black Fire*, pp. 29–30.

since her return from New York and in 1838 she served as the organisation's recording secretary and librarian.⁵⁷

The PFASS agreed to Douglass's request, continuing her \$300 annual salary and appointing an interracial oversight committee that included Black member Margaretta Forten. Ambitiously, the PFASS then set out to support and oversee all of the schools teaching Black children in Philadelphia. However, the PFASS education committee, assigned to visit other Black schools, failed to make the necessary visits, and by 1841 it had been discontinued. Practically, the oversight of Douglass's school was all that PFASS could manage. And within two years, it was clear that there were severe strains between the committee and Douglass as well. The committee declined Douglass's request that the PFASS pay the \$120 annual salary for her assistant. There were troubling differences in regard to the school's policy relating to students' absences. When her students were needed at home to care for sick relatives or younger siblings, or inclement weather kept them away from school, Douglass was inclined to excuse their absences. The committee urged a harsher line, including expelling students for excessive absences.⁵⁸

In March 1840, Douglass requested for the PFASS supervision of her school to be ended, citing these substantial differences. The PFASS acquiesced, approving a resolution that the 'Society deeply regrets the withdrawal' of Douglass's school from their 'charge, ... and that they wish for it a continuance of prosperity and usefulness for it under her care'. The PFASS continued a small financial subsidy for her school until 1849.⁵⁹ As had been the case in New York earlier, it would be an open question whether the mostly White anti-slavery activists would show any interest in the hard work necessary for what was called 'racial uplift', building up institutions such as schools within the African American community that would enable that community to thrive. However, one answer to that question was provided in the 1840s and 1850s when, utilising a substantial bequest from White Quaker Richard Humphreys, White Quakers joined with African Americans in Philadelphia to inaugurate the Institute for Colored Youth (ICY), an institution for higher education for Black Philadelphians that, at the insistence of Black parents and with the concurrence of White Quaker managers, would teach the liberal arts and provide African American youth with an intellectually challenging education. The financially tenuous period of Douglass's school administration was over, as she merged her school in 1853 and 1854 into the girls' preparatory department of the ICY. She would teach at the ICY until her retirement in 1877.⁶⁰

57 Soderlund, J. R., 'Priorities and Power: the Philadelphia female anti-slavery society', in Fagan Yellin and Van Horne (eds), *The Abolitionist Sisterhood*, pp. 67–88.

58 Richmond, S. J., 'Race, Class, and Antislavery: African American women in the transatlantic antislavery movement', *Journal of Women's History* (Fall 2019), pp. 64–66.

59 Richmond, 'Race, Class and Antislavery', pp. 64–65; Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom*, pp. 84–85; Bacon, *Sarah Mapps Douglass*, 13.

60 Genovese, H., 'Not a Myth: Quakers and Racial Justice', *Quaker Studies* 19/2 (2015): 243–59; Jackson-Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life*, pp. 17–30, 148–49; Silcox, H. S.,

By the 1850s, her extant letters seemed less critical of Philadelphia Quakers; according to Margaret Hope Bacon, Douglass then 'evidently felt reconciled' with Orthodox Friends, and Quaker meetings were 'now a blessing to her'.⁶¹

The Families of Truth and Douglass

Sojourner Truth's husband, Thomas, a much older man, held by the same enslaver (John Dumont) who held Truth in bondage, did not join her after she self-emancipated. (A previous husband, Robert, a Black man not enslaved by Dumont, had been driven away by Dumont.) She did not remarry. Dumont was likely the father of one of her five children, and whether she was willing (or not) to have sexual relations with him, is not an easy question to answer from the historical record.⁶²

There was no intergenerational wealth transfer between Truth and her three daughters, Diana, Elizabeth and Sophia. None were formally educated. All were housekeepers, and all died poor.⁶³ Truth made the following remarks about her family members at an abolitionist gathering in the 1850s:

I did have love for them, but what has become of it, I cannot tell you. I have had two husbands, but I never possessed one of my own. I have had five children and never could take any one of them up and say 'my child' or 'my children', unless it was when no one could see me.

At that 1850s moment, travelling and speaking were what she lived for, since 'I have been robbed of all of my affection for my husband and my children'.⁶⁴

Sarah Douglass's free status, her membership in a tiny elite social class, her even more select Quaker religious affiliation (with its expectations at that time of endogamy), and her racial status as African American combined to leave her with few marital options. In 1855, at age 49, she married Episcopal priest William Douglass, a widower with nine children. (The surname was incidental and did not signify any prior family relationship.) The couple produced no offspring. According to historian Margaret Hope Bacon, the marriage was not a happy one.⁶⁵ When William died in 1861, Sarah, who had long worked as an educator, continued to do so.

'Nineteenth-century Black militant: Octavius v. Catto (1839–1871)', *Pennsylvania History* 44 (January 1977), pp. 52–76 at 55; Bacon, *Sarah Mapps Douglass*, pp. 52–53; Perkins, *Fanny Jackson Coppin*, pp. 60–67, 303.

61 Bacon, M. H., 'New Light on Sarah Mapps Douglass and Her Reconciliation with Friends', *Quaker History* (Spring 2001), pp. 28–49, at p. 33.

62 Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*; Painter, *Sojourner Truth*.

63 Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, pp. 252–53.

64 Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, p. 276.

65 Bacon, *Sarah Mapps Douglass*, p. 28.

Douglass, Truth and the African American Pantheon

African American elites often reminded themselves and the White world that African American accomplishments were evidence for both the abstract possibility and the practical means of uplifting African Americans as a race. And though mostly it was Black men whose triumphs were lauded, sometimes there was token inclusion of an African American woman in a list dominated by men. Some examples here may be instructive. A Pennsylvania Quaker abolitionist ('M') travelling through Missouri in 1846 reports having this conversation with slaveholders from that state:

They [slaveholders in Missouri] spoke of the inability of the Negro to rise and become educated... In reply to these remarks, the names of Frederick Douglass, Charles Remond, James Forten, Sarah Douglass, and others, were mentioned, and their histories related; and evidence upon evidence produced, to show that ... *the free Negro could become an educated, intelligent man*, and therefore the sin was the greater to keep him in that state which produced this intellectual degradation, this mental death.⁶⁶

Fifty-seven years later, in 1903, W. E. B. DuBois, celebrating the contributions of a Black elite which he called the 'Talented Tenth', produced a similar, yet subtly different, list to account for the indispensable contributions of African Americans to the struggle for the abolition of slavery:

Too little notice has been taken of the work that the Talented Tenth among Negroes took in the great abolition crusade ... Black leaders stood shoulder to shoulder with white men in a movement, the success of which would have been impossible without them. There was [Robert] Purvis and Remond, [James W.C.] Pennington and [Henry] Highland Garnett, Sojourner Truth and Alexander Crummell, and, above all, Frederick Douglass—what would the abolition movement been without them?⁶⁷

Frederick Douglass and his fellow Garrisonian lecturer and frequent travel companion Charles Lenox Remond, from Salem, Massachusetts, were the only persons included in both lists. Beyond Douglass and Remond, these two lists diverged, but of most interest here is that M's list included Sarah Douglass as the only African American woman worthy of mention in terms of intellectual achievement. DuBois' list, assessing the somewhat different and more complex issue of the 'Talented Tenth's' contributions to abolitionism as a movement, thus introducing intellect and political acumen as dual measures of lifetimes of witness, includes Truth as the only woman in his list which includes Frederick Douglass,

66 M., 'Correspondence', *Friends' Weekly Intelligencer*, 31 Oct. 1846, 3, 31. Emphasis in the original.

67 DuBois, W. E. B., 'The Talented Tenth', in Chandler, N. H. (ed.), *W.E.B. DuBois: the problem of the color line at the turn of the twentieth century: The Essential Early Essays*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2015 [1903], p. 212.

Remond and several other men.⁶⁸ M's conversation, occurring as it did in 1846 before Sojourner Truth achieved prominence as an abolitionist and women's rights lecturer, could not have included Truth, but Sarah Douglass's inclusion in his list demonstrates a certain prominence already achieved by his contemporary Philadelphian.

The combination of strong anti-slavery argument with implicit sexist positioning is evident in the writing of both 'M' and DuBois. When the noun 'man' was used by either author, it was never entirely clear whether that noun is specific to the male gender or is intended to be construed in a generic sense. Perhaps Sarah Douglass and Sojourner Truth are being included as honorary men. In any event, neither 'M'—in naming Douglass—nor DuBois naming Truth made clear why they included only one African American woman in their list of meritorious intellectual, social-justice-oriented elites composed of African Americans.

With his encyclopaedic mind, DuBois definitely knew of Sarah Mapps Douglass, and he appeared to place her in the second rank of Black leaders, below Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass and Charles Remond.⁶⁹ In his 1899 volume, *The Philadelphia Negro*, after furnishing his reader with a thorough history of African Americans in Philadelphia almost up to the current moment, DuBois added this afterthought, part of a bracketed final paragraph to the fourth chapter:

Among men not already mentioned in this period should be noted the Rev. C[harles] W. Gardner, Dr. J[ames J. G.] Bias, the dentist, James McCrummell, and Sarah M. Douglass. All these were prominent Negroes of the day and had much influence.⁷⁰

Ironically, DuBois's inclusion of Sarah Douglass in this list, as an honorary man, serves to highlight the unthinking erasure of other women worthy of notice, ones

68 If one were to chart family and community ties for these eminent African Americans, other women would appear as connections to men on both lists. For example, Harriet Forten Purvis was the daughter of James Forten (from M's list) and the wife of Robert Purvis (the first-named man on DuBois's list).

69 If citations in the JSTOR database can be taken as an objective measure, DuBois was, and is, unquestionably right about Truth and Frederick Douglass in this regard, but the comparative data for Charles Lenox Remond and Sarah Mapps Douglass are far more interesting. Remond exceeds Sarah Douglass in citations in all eras, but since 1990, the disparity has not been so pronounced. The figures are as follows:

1900–50: Remond, 32 citations, Douglass, 7 citations;
1950–70: Remond, 24 citations, Douglass, 6 citations;
1970–90: Remond, 152 citations, Douglass, 10 citations;
1990–2010: Remond, 122 citations, Douglass, 80 citations;
2010–23: Remond, 150 citations, Douglass 90 citations.

(Both sets of numbers are adjusted slightly to eliminate other persons with the same name; the use of 'Sarah Douglass' yields more valid citations prior to 1990, 'Sarah Mapps Douglass' has a higher yield after 1990.)

70 DuBois, W. E. B., *The Philadelphia Negro: a social study*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996 [1899], p. 45.

who were also deeply dedicated to human rights causes. Bias, McCrummell and Gardner were Philadelphia abolitionists and contemporaries of Sarah Douglass.⁷¹ Yet Eliza Ann Bias, the wife of James Bias, and Sarah McCrummell, wife of James McCrummell, both of whom were active in local abolitionist organisations such as female literary associations and the Female Vigilance Association, were omitted. In 1833, Sarah McCrummell had been one of the founders of the PFASS, and Sarah Douglass would have worked more closely with Eliza Ann and the other Sarah in the highly gender-segregated social justice organisations of the mid-nineteenth century, than she would have with either James Bias or James McCrummell.⁷²

Friend or Enemy? Differing Assessments of Quakerism

Truth, best acquainted with Quakers from upstate New York and Michigan, had a positive view of Friends. ‘I have always loved the Quakers’,⁷³ Truth said of the religious sect, representatives of whom had aided her own liberation and the rescue of her son. Her mediated autobiography stated that Quakers had shown themselves as committed to ‘living out the principles of the gospel of Christ’.⁷⁴ Biographer Margaret Washington states that Truth’s Ulster County, New York ‘association with the Quakers would blossom into a lifelong connection with this white sect in the vanguard of the black liberation struggle’⁷⁵—at least some of Truth’s contemporaries who were White Quakers fit this description.

In regard to the midwestern milieu that Truth frequented, some scholars have observed that early nineteenth-century Quakers in such midwestern states as Michigan and Indiana generally were more racially egalitarian than their eastern brothers and sisters, as these mid-westerners ‘systematically and repeatedly condemned racial prejudice’ and ‘gave considerable time and effort to promoting black education and relieving cases of poverty’.⁷⁶ Vociferous opposition to racial

71 Kashatus, W., *The Underground Railroad and Philadelphia*, South Bend, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2021, pp. 58–61.

72 Per DuBois and Winch, James Bias was a ‘dentist and bleeder’; Winch adds that Eliza Ann Bias ‘assisted him in his work’. Winch informs us that James McCrummell was also a dentist, and Sarah McCrummell was a hairworker, i.e. a hair dresser and a maker of wigs. All would have been solidly positioned in Philadelphia’s Black elite. Winch, J., “‘You Have Talents Only Cultivate Them:’ Philadelphia’s Black Female Literary Societies and the Abolitionist Crusade,” in Fagan Yellin, J. and Van Horne, J. C. (eds), *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women’s Political Culture in Antebellum America*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994, pp. 101–18, at pp. 115–16; Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom*, p. 77.

73 Washington, *Sojourner Truth’s America*, p. 151.

74 Titus, F., Gilbert, O. and Truth, S., *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, Battle Creek, MI: Published for the Author, 1978, pp. 46–47.

75 Washington, *Sojourner Truth’s America*, p. 63.

76 Hamm, T. D., Beckham, A., Florio, M., Giles, K. and Hopper, M., “‘A Great and Good People’: midwestern Quakers and the struggle against slavery”, *Indiana Magazine of History* 100 (March 2004), pp. 3–25, at p. 7.

oppression was especially evident among the Progressive Friends that Truth favoured, but, among midwestern Friends, outspokenness and activism on racial justice was not unique to them. Midwestern Friends' activism sometimes translated into desegregation of Quaker schools which seldom happened in Quaker schools in the east.⁷⁷

During a forum held in 1856 under the auspices of Progressive Friends in Michigan, abolitionist Henry C. Wright harshly denounced conservative Christian churches for cooperating with enslavers. Sojourner Truth responded, 'We ought to be like Christ. He said, 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do'. If we want to lead them, we should not get out of their sight'.⁷⁸

Douglass, embedded in the Philadelphia stronghold of Quakers imbued with intense White power and privilege, expressed exhortation more pointedly directed to Friends, while, like Truth, drawing from the gospels' reports on Jesus's example. In her experience, while White Friends appear not to have posed any threat to her, most misunderstood her and looked down upon her:

The hardest lesson my heavenly father ever set me to learn, was to love Friends, and in anguish of spirit I have often queried, why the Lord should require me to go among a people who despise me on account of my complexion; but I have seen that it is designed to humble me and to teach me the lesson, 'Love your enemies, and pray for them who despitefully use you'.⁷⁹

In this context, her readers must wrestle with how to make sense of her use of the word 'enemies', which she associated with those White Quakers who humiliated her and were condescending toward her.

In the ultimate analysis, this comparison and contrast between two African American Quaker women is grounded in considerable complexity, especially in respect to any Quaker dimension of such analysis. Douglass's and Truth's different personal experiences of White Quakers underlay their divergent responses to Quakerism, which itself had developed diverse enough manifestations by the mid-nineteenth century to provoke varying assessments by participants and observers such as Douglass and Truth. If it was the case that much of the Delaware Valley Quakerism of that era had been influenced more deeply by White supremacist culture than had the Progressive Quakers in Michigan, that would help to account for Douglass's more anguished and sharp characterisations of her White Quaker neighbours and friends, at least in her earlier years, as compared to Truth's gentler and more affirming characterisations of her White Quaker

77 Hamm et al., 'A Great and Good People', pp. 12–16. Progressive Friends in the eastern states, although a small minority as compared to the Orthodox and conservative Hicksite Quakers there, were similarly vociferous in opposing racial oppression, and Truth enjoyed her visits with them: Angell, 'The Early Period', in *Black Fire*, pp. 24–25; Hewitt, *Radical Friend*.

78 Mabee and Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth*, p. 238. Truth cited Luke 23:34.

79 Bacon, *Sarah Mapps Douglass*, p. 5. Douglass cited Matthew 5:44.

neighbours and friends. Most of Douglass's extant writings were composed in the 1830s and 1840s (and her later writings were milder), while most statements attributed to Truth were recorded in the 1850s or thereafter; thus, it is also possible that, over time, there was progress on racial issues more generally in the northern and midwestern states that would help to account for some of the startling distinctions noted here.

Concluding Observations and New Research Questions

In this essay, we have seen some ways that race and social class have undergirded the ways that White Quakers interacted with both Truth and Douglass, and Truth and Douglass interacted with White Quakers. In continuing studies of Black Quakers, scholars should be alert to ways that not only race but also social class, and perceptions of such social realities and constructs, may have shaped and influenced intra-denominational relationships.

We have seen that Sarah Mapps Douglass was part of a tenacious, yet somewhat precarious, intellectual and business elite within the African American community in the early and mid-nineteenth century development of American capitalism—in quantitative sociological terms, not part of a 'Talented Tenth', as DuBois would have had it, but more likely (for that era) what might be termed a Talented Fiftieth.⁸⁰ On the whole, Sojourner Truth was more conventionally working class (although with significant and partially sustaining ties to a radical portion of the White elite), and this reality may have eased her acceptance by some Friends. Truth and Douglass may have had somewhat different orientations toward describing the connection of the dignity of all forms of compensated labour alongside the aspirations of uplift, whether personal uplift or the uplift of the race.

Given the different and somewhat contrasting social stratification and articulation of vocational aspirations in our own times, not a subject of this essay per se, it is understandable that twenty-first-century scholars might need to put special effort into understanding how an era that seems similar in some ways to modern capitalism might manifest significantly different contextual variables that need to be explored. While the contextual information presented here may help to shine some light on White Quakers' responses to both Truth and Douglass, the disrespect shown to both Douglass and Truth should have been (and should still be) a powerful cause for great dismay and shame.

While recent works such as Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste* demonstrate the usefulness of a consideration of caste to the analysis of race relations in the United States, this article also hopes to make the case for the importance of deeper consideration of

80 Elements of precariousness included the White supremacist mob violence mentioned above, and threats of kidnapping into slavery by being forcibly and involuntarily removed to southern states. Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom*, p. 121.

social class, including its interaction with caste. In numerous times of crisis, and also in simple aspects of everyday living such as family life, the (differing) social class identification of neither Douglass nor Truth conferred protection from the devastating violence of caste and racial oppression, as they well knew.⁸¹ Nevertheless, the self-understanding, aspirations and accomplishments of members of the Black community, including Black Quakers, are difficult to comprehend without due consideration to social class, often a hidden dimension of the interactions between White people and Black people in the United States, including White and Black Quakers. Gender also was often a hidden reality and construct, one that Truth, in particular, worked diligently to surface into nineteenth-century American life in many of its ramifications. However fragmentary the historical record, we would do well to give greater consideration to the multi-dimensional revelatory potential of the life-giving and powerful witness of these two Black American women who closely associated with Quakers during much, or all, of their lives, Sojourner Truth and Sarah Mapps Douglass.

Fuller consideration of these topics would also closely examine the witness of other Black Quaker women leaders from the nineteenth century, or later eras. Two Black Philadelphian women, both Hicksite or Progressive Quakers, meriting further examination are Harriet Forten Purvis, whose two sons are buried in the Byberry Meeting cemetery close to what was her home, and Julia Rustin, a post-civil-war-born Black Quaker who was the grandmother of Quaker activist Bayard Rustin (chief organiser of the 1963 March on Washington and much else). Julia Rustin was responsible for much of the latter's parenting in West Chester, Pennsylvania. Such in-depth analysis also needs to be extended to other Black Quaker women who exerted leadership in or around the Orthodox Quaker branch; in particular, Black Quaker women associated with the Southland monthly meeting near Helena, Arkansas, deserve greater attention.⁸²

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Laura Leavitt for her helpful comments at the 2021 sessions of the Quaker Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion, and also the two anonymous reviewers for this journal for their helpful comments.

81 Lacey Hunter convincingly makes this argument, in respect to Sarah Douglass: Hunter, L. P., "'To Participate in the Knowledge of Piety, Truth, and Justice': African American women and the Jeremiadic call for equality in antebellum Philadelphia', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 144 (October 2020), pp. 342–44, 347.

82 Bacon, M. H., 'Robert Purvis: friend of the Friends', *Friends Journal*, 1 July 2002; Angell, 'The Early Period', in *Black Fire*, p. 31; D'Emilio, J., *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, New York: Free Press, 2003, pp. 8–12; Kennedy, T. C., *A History of Southland College: the Society of Friends and black education in Arkansas*, Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2009; for later eras, see Weaver, Kriese, and Angell (eds), *Black Fire*, pp. 139–50, 179–94, 233–40.

Author Details

Stephen W. Angell is the Leatherock Professor of Quaker Studies at the Earlham School of Religion. With Ben Dandelion and David Watt, he is co-editor of *The Creation of Modern Quaker Diversity, 1830–1937*, forthcoming from Penn State University Press. With Hal Weaver and Paul Kriese he edited *Black Fire: African American Quakers on Spirituality and Human Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: Quaker Press of FGC, 2011). His latest published book, with Chuck Fager and Jade Souza Rockwell, is *Shattered by the Light, or the Ruins and the Green: Quaker churches in the northwest and midwest clash and divide over LGBTQ issues* (Quaker Theology Press, 2021).

Mailing address: Stephen W. Angell, c/o Earlham School of Religion, 228 College Ave., Richmond, IN 47374, U.S.A.

Email: angelst@earlham.edu