Friend of the Slave, Enemy of Emancipation

Indiana Quakers and the Abolition Question, 1826-1857

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The Society of Friends is frequently touted as the one institution on the right side of the slavery debate. Keeping to themselves and living non-violent and religious lives, the Quakers banned slaveholding among their members and upheld belief in equality of all before God. But despite the scholarly literature that constantly searches for redeeming Americans amidst a racist, slave-holding society, even the Quakers were limited in their protests of slavery and in their treatment of free blacks. Promoting colonization and separation of the races, they were far from the popular image of strong-willed Garrisonion abolitionists. The Friends in Indiana were no exception. Indiana, a free state, saw colonization societies, promoters of gradual emancipation, and outspoken opposition of abolitionists. "Most Indianans regarded slavery as a violation of the laws of God and man," historian James Madison observes, "But few whites in pioneer Indiana believed in the equality of the races or made efforts to improve the unfortunate lot of many black Americans, slave or free."[1] Quaker abolitionist Levi Coffin constantly argued with fellow Quakers on the importance of ending slavery and actively aiding fugitives, but even he failed to notice injustices and hesitated to promote racial equality. Indiana Quakers who supported emancipation failed to convince the majority of members to support abolitionism. Indiana Quakers were far more comfortable with the *idea* that slaves were being rescued than actually being a *part* of that rescue. As the Civil War loomed, the Society of Friends in Indiana found more solidarity in each other than in anti-slavery work. Levi Coffin's experiences in Indiana and the 1842 split between abolitionist and traditional Quakers in the state show that even the Society of Friends found it difficult before the Civil War to accept or even tolerate racial equality.

In other historians' work on the Society of Friends, the focus has been on Quakers who went beyond simply protesting slavery and actively fought for emancipation and fair treatment of African Americans. Historian Ryan Jordan in his book, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse: the*

[1] James H. Madison, *The Indiana Way: A State History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 107.

Quakers and the Abolitionist Dilemma, 1820-1865, tells the story of Quakers and abolitionism through the eyes of the men and women who took extraordinary efforts to end slavery. When discussing the 1842 split of the Indiana Yearly Meeting over the abolitionist movement, Jordan gives the most attention to the perceptions of the new group, the Anti-Slavery Friends. Little is mentioned about the official Yearly Meeting except to say that the Anti-Slavery Friends disagreed with it. By focusing on the select few, Jordan devalues the majority. Instead, the Indiana Yearly Meeting, with it less aggressive approach to anti-slavery, continued to be the dominant Quaker group across the state of Indiana both during the split and when the groups reunited in 1857.[2]

Jordan's work is a part of the small amount of recent literature on Indiana Quakers and slavery. While books discussing the Underground Railroad, such as Larry Gara's *The Liberty Line* and Fergus Bordewich's *Bound for Canaan*, mention the split of the Yearly Meeting, they focus on Levi Coffin, an abolitionist who lived in Indiana during the late 1820s to the late 1840s, and abolitionist Quakers' assistance for fugitives. A closer examination of documents from the time of the split, however, reveals the weakness of the Indiana Yearly Meeting's support for abolition and black rights alongside their assistance on behalf of fugitives. The Society of Friends "prohibit[ed] our members from holding in bondage our fellow men" and for the majority of Friends in Indiana that was all they needed to do.[3] Their version of passive anti-slavery meant only that individual Quakers did not personally own slaves. Levi Coffin and other Quaker abolitionists, however, followed William Lloyd Garrison's call for immediate abolition in the 1830s. Garrison's philosophy most likely encouraged Levi Coffin and other likeminded

[2] Ryan P. Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse: the Quakers and the Abolitionist Dilemma, 1820-1865* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 48-62.
[3] "Extract from the Friend's Discipline," *The Free Labor Advocate*, Feb. 8, 1841. Plowshares. Earlham, Goshen, and Manchester Colleges. <http://palni.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/ecplow/id/65098>

Quakers to go beyond removing slaves from their own lives and communities and actively eradicate all slavery.[4] Contrasting the active efforts of Levi Coffin and the Newport community where he lived with the prevailing opinion of Quakers in Indiana who avoided direct contact with African Americans reveals the Society of Friends' hesitation to promote immediate abolition. This hesitation only grew as the Indiana Yearly Meeting began to ban abolitionist activity in the meetinghouses and ultimately expelled eight men for their abolitionist efforts. Looking at both sides of the spilt reveals a whole picture of Indiana's Society of Friends and abolition in the antebellum period.

Coffin recorded his efforts as an abolitionist in his memoir, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin.* Written in 1876 when he was 78, Coffin detailed his experiences with anti-slavery and the Underground Railroad. The memoir explained the religious reasons behind Coffin's bold actions and ideas. Coffin hoped his memoir would "accomplish something toward the eradication of the spirit of caste, which still exists in our land," and that by discussing the fight to end slavery, he could help end the racist attitudes present at the end of Reconstruction.[5]

Coffin's experiences with the Underground Railroad and the reactions of his Quaker peers showed how, in the 1830s, Quakers tolerated radical actions, if not participated in them. Coffin moved to the Newport, Indiana, Quaker settlement with his wife, Catherine Coffin, in 1826.[6] North Carolina, Coffin's first home, offered him his first glances of the repercussions of slavery. Coffin recalled watching the cruel treatment of a slave where "a young man seized a fagot from the fire and struck the negro a furious blow across the head, baring the skull, covering his back and breast with blood, and his head with fire . . . . I was so deeply moved that I left my

[4] Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union: Vol. 1* (New York: Collier Books, 1992), 144.
[5] Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin* (Cincinnati: The Robert Clarke Company, 1898), i-iii.
[6] Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana 1816-1850: The Pioneer Era* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1998), 565.

breakfast untasted, and going off by myself gave vent to my feelings in sobs and tears."[7] With these experiences in mind, Coffin moved to Indiana prepared for an active role in the anti-slavery movement.

Newport, Indiana (modern day Fountain City) was a predominantly Quaker community, with just twenty families in 1826, mainly North Carolinians who had relocated north to escape slave laws in the South.[8] The free black population present also came from North Carolina sent by the state's Society of Friends. After leaving slavery behind and moving to a free state, many Newport Quakers felt their duty to the faith's anti-slavery policy was completed and became complacent towards free blacks. The Committee for Free Blacks, the members of the Indiana Yearly Meeting who worked primarily on educating and maintaining schools for African Americans, struggled to get all Indiana Quakers to accept African Americans in their communities.[9] In Newport, the black community created their own Methodist church for worship; they did not join the Friends. Other prominent churches were white Methodists and Wesleyans, which frequently worked together with the Quakers. The school house and church buildings played a large role in the community, offering public meeting spaces and auditoriums when speakers, including abolitionists, came to the town. Coffin established the first dry goods store upon his arrival, as well as a new role in protesting slavery for the residents of Newport.[10]

Despite the lack of effort by most Quakers to encourage free blacks to immigrate or to treat them as equals, there was a significant free black population in Indiana and Wayne County where Newport was located. By 1850, there were 11,262 free blacks in Indiana. Wayne County

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[7] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 14.
[8] Daniel Huff, "A Biographical Sketch of some of the former and later Citizens of Newport and Fountain City Indiana," Box 2, Folder 2, Huff-Nixon Papers, Friends Collection and College Archives, Earlham College Libraries, Richmond, Ind.; Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: the epic story of the Underground Railroad, America's first civil rights movement* (New York: Amistad, 2005), 95.
[9] Bordewich, Bound for Canaan, 95.
[10] Daniel Huff, "Reminiscences of Newport and Fountain City and its Environs from 1830 to 1896," Box 2, Folder 2, Huff-Nixon Papers, Friends Collection and College Archives, Earlham College Libraries, Richmond, Ind.

had 1,036 African Americans, four percent of the county's population of 25,320 citizens, the highest population of any Indiana county.[11] In Newport's township, New Garden, 12.6% of residents were free blacks. While it seems like a small number, New Garden contained the largest group of free blacks in the entire county, and therefore the largest in the whole state. Wayne County also had sixteen Quaker churches, the largest number in Indiana.[12] Such statistics indicate that free blacks still chose to settle next to Quaker communities, with the largest number next to the principal Society of Friends population. Despite the Quakers' hesitancy to support free African Americans, they were still the safest whites for free blacks to live around in Indiana.

The Underground Railroad in Indiana consisted of towns along rivers and Quaker communities near Ohio and was much smaller than other networks. Three main routes took fugitives up through the Hoosier state. The first went from Cincinnati and Lawrenceburg, Ohio to Newport, Fort Wayne, and finally to Michigan; the second from the Ohio River crossings to Columbus, Indianapolis, and ending in South Bend; and the third started in Evansville, Indiana and moved along the Wabash River through Lafayette until it also reached South Bend.[13] These paths were subject to frequent changes, so regular stops needed organization in order to keep track of fugitive slaves and ensure they received the help they needed.[14] That organization came to Newport through Levi Coffin.

When he first arrived in Indiana, Coffin heard of the many fugitive slaves who passed through the free black houses in the community but failed to reach freedom. "The fugitive slaves who took refuge with these people were often pursued and captured, the colored people not being

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[11] Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana Before 1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 44-5; J.D. DeBow, The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850 (Washington: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), 779, 801.
[12] DeBow, *The Seventh Census,* 801.
[13] Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, 219.
[14] Huff, "A Biographical Sketch."

very skillful in concealing them, or shrewd in making arrangements to forward them to Canada," Coffin wrote. He "was pained to hear of the capture of these fugitives, and inquired of some of the Friends in our village why they did not take them in and secrete them, when they were pursed, and then aid them?"[15] The lack of white participants in the Underground Railroad shocked Coffin, especially since the free blacks' efforts "failed" the fugitive slaves. Bordewich suggests that the free black communities were not secure enough to offer fugitives protection with "prejudice and the unreliability of law and order" keeping them from safety. Free blacks were also frequently isolated from larger towns and remained unprotected when slaveholders or slave catchers came to their communities.[16] Coffin, on the other hand, did not explain in his memoir why the free blacks struggled to succeed, suggesting that he did not try to understand and assumed their skin color restricted them. Despite his Quaker intentions of treating all humans like brothers, Coffin dismissed free blacks' efforts regardless of their major role in the Underground Railroad.

While Coffin roused certain members of the community into joining the Underground Railroad, he made assumptions about his African American neighbors that kept him from treating them equally. While bearing "a testimony against slavery" was a tenant of Quaker faith since the 1770s and the Quakers founded some of the earliest abolitionist societies after the Revolutionary War, the Friends struggled to go beyond moving to a free state and personally not engaging in slaveholding.[17] Those who might have wished to do more were also unsure how to proceed, and whether the risk of arrest, harassment, or even death was worth it.[18] When Coffin declared his home open for fugitive slaves at the end of 1826, the community initially

[15] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 107.
[16] Bordewich, Bound for Canaan, 200.
[17] Bordewich, Bound for Canaan, 95.
[18] Huff, "A Biographical Sketch."

disapproved. At first, "many of my pro-slavery customers left me for a time, my sales were diminished, and for a while my business prospects were discouraging," but Coffin's "faith was not shaken."[19] Because of his status in Newport, Coffin had loyal neighbors and a community that, while not always willing to perform the illegal work itself, was willing to assist Coffin in keeping the slaves safe and did not boycott his business. Only shortly after mentioning the lost customers, Coffin remarked how "new customers soon came in to fill the places of those who had left me. . . . My trade increased, and I enlarged my business. I was blessed in all my efforts and succeeded beyond my expectations."[20] Coffin credited his success to "my business influence and large acquaintance," which gave him "protection in my labors for the oppressed fugitives."[21] While criticizing the free blacks' ineffective efforts to send fugitive slaves to Canada, Coffin forgot the benefits offered him those families lacked. He had a community strong enough to support his activities and ensure his financial success.

Coffin also did not mention the advantage of being a white man with full legal and social rights in Indiana as compared to the inferior status of free blacks. His knowledge of the law and his rights as a citizen were denied to Indiana's free blacks, putting them at a disadvantage on the Underground Railroad. African Americans in Indiana were limited by laws and race prejudice. Future Senator Daniel D. Pratt remarked in 1834 at an Indianapolis colonization meeting how "not a feature in our institutions but reminds [free blacks] that they are objects of contempt and ridicule."[22] Indiana's government and laws were barriers to free blacks hoping to reside in the Hoosier state. The state constitution only outlawed slavery; it did not offer African Americans

[19] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 108-110.
[20] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 110.
[21] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 118.
[22] Daniel D. Pratt as cited by Carmony, *Indiana 1816-1858*, 562.

suffrage, equality in the courts, freedom in marriage, or the ability to hold political positions.[23] Laws created multiple setbacks for the free blacks, most notably the 1831 law requiring a $500 bond from Hoosier free blacks to ensure they would not become a liability to the state. Free blacks faced mob violence as well, including local residents and visiting speakers, such as Frederick Douglass.[24]

The obstacles free blacks faced to assist fugitive slaves were often greater than those they faced every day. The legal protections offered to Coffin, and his dependence on slave-hunters knowing that "if they committed any trespass, or went beyond the letter of the law, I would have them arrested," allowed him to proclaim himself the "President of the Underground Railroad" and laud his successes publically.[25] African Americans could be as clever as Coffin, and yet without legal protections for their homes and with the risk of losing their jobs, it was difficult for them to stop slave catchers from doing whatever they pleased. "Search, seizure, assault, murder: all could be and were perpetrated against African Americans without fear of legal repercussions" claims historian Keith Griffler.[26] Coffin's inability to see his racial advantage reflects Quakers' inability to treat the free blacks surrounding their community as equals. Racism was inherent in all Hoosiers; even Quakers could not completely separate themselves from it.

Because of this discrimination, most Quakers agreed with the state's residents about blacks' inherent inferiority despite religious doctrines demanding an acknowledgement of slavery's inherent sin. Coffin's distant cousin, Elijah Coffin, was one of these Quakers. While he protested the 1831 black law legislation in Indiana, which included the required $500 bond, he also feared the sudden end of slavery, saying that "free states would 'fill up with runaway

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[23] Carmony, *Indiana 1816-1850*, 562.
[24] Madison, *Indiana Way*, 107; Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 228-9.
[25] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 118; Keith P. Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom: African Americans and the Forging of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 8.
[26] Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom*, 8.

Negroes' who would then 'disturb the peace and harmony.'" According to Elijah Coffin, abolition would only lead to more "blood and carnage."[27] He was not alone; Quakers across Indiana joined him in protesting emancipation of slaves and Quakers who pushed for immediate abolition such as Levi Coffin.[28] According to historian James Madison, the majority of all Hoosiers demonstrated prejudices over abolition.[29] Just like other residents of Indiana and the United States, the majority of Quakers feared a possible negative impact on their community if slavery was to be abolished and freed slaves moved north.

These Quakers promoted colonization as an alternative to immediate abolition. Colonization was popular for many Indiana Quakers by offering a solution that ended slavery while also removing free blacks from their responsibility and from society. The American Colonization Society promoted the idea that white and black Americans could not coexist, and therefore freed slaves needed to relocate to Africa. Indiana and Ohio in particular saw a large number of African Americans come into their states, and while the free black population was miniscule compared to the white population, white citizens feared they would be outnumbered.[30] Quakers were not exempt from this fear, and Coffin named colonization supports as part of the opposition abolitionist Quakers faced from their fellow Friends.[31]

The residents of Newport were unique in their visible role on the Underground Railroad and willingness to have contact with fugitives. Coffin was not the only house that offered fugitives refuge, and the entire town developed a reputation for assisting escaped slaves. According to historian Oliver Huff, a decedent of early Newport residents, "the work of helping fugitive slaves began very early in the history of the old town, but was not thoroughly organized

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[27] Elijah Coffin as citied by Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse*, 50.
[28] Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse*, 50-1.
[29] Madison, *Indiana Way*, 107.
[30] Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom*, 22.
[31] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 230.

until Levi Coffin took his position at the helm, and by his very prudence and boldness, gave confidence to all those disposed to engage in the dangerous work."[32] He listed several men who housed fugitives, transported slaves along the Underground Railroad, offered care to the slaves, donated land for an African American school, and spoke out against slavery.[33] Benjamin Stanton published *The Free Labor Advocate,* an abolitionist publication, in the town. Dr. Henry H. Way edited the same publication and cared for the fugitives' medical needs. Eli Osborn, who lived on the same corner as Coffin, took slaves from Cincinnati to Newport.[34] An active web of abolitionists ran throughout the town through this group of men, and Coffin relied on his neighbors for his successes.

Despite this support, only a few Newport citizens allowed slaves into their homes or their wagons but most at least tolerated Coffin's Underground Railroad activities. Instead of attempting to imprison the Coffins and other abolitionists, neighbors kept silent or even assisted by donating goods. Coffin relied on his fellow Quakers to keep the fugitives in his house safe from capture, and recorded several successful concealments from slave catchers. "Slave-hunters…knew that I harbored slaves and aided them to escape, but they never ventured to search my premises, or molest me in any way," Coffin wrote, accrediting this to his business but also because they "knew also that I had many friends who would stand at my back and aid me in prosecuting them." For example, Coffin's neighbors became a part of his plans to protect a pair of slave women hiding from a persistent master. His wife, Catherine Coffin, was put in charge under Coffin's instructions: "If the searchers attempted to enter our house, she was to rattle the large dinner bell violently, and at this signal the neighbors would rush in, and I would…have the

[32] O. N. Huff, "Unnamed Anti-Slavery Heroes of Old Newport," *The Indiana Quarterly Magazine of History* 3, no. 3 (1907): 133.
[33] Huff, "Unnamed Heroes," 135-142.
[34] Huff, "Unnamed Heroes," 136, 139; Huff, Reminiscences of Newport.

negro hunters arrested for attempting to enter my house without legal authority."[35] These neighbors came despite their lack of strong feelings towards abolition because of their friendship and faith in Coffin and because they knew the African Americans' stays were temporary.

There was a still an anti-abolitionist group in Newport, but they were kept anonymous and vague in Coffin's memoir and Daniel Huff's recollections. Coffin referred to "sympathizers with slave-hunters" and "prominent members of the Society of Friends [who] opposed" unconditional emancipation in his memoir.[36] Huff solely focused on the abolitionists or those sympathetic to their cause, and does not name anyone in Newport with opposite views. The vague nature of Coffin's references, as well as Daniel Huff's focus on anti-slavery Quakers alone, shows that these men cared more about Newport's reputation as an abolitionist, Underground Railroad town and did not want to offer an opposing view of the town.

The hesitancy of other Quakers to engage in direct anti-slavery work themselves and Coffin's constant need to persuade his neighbors that it was in compliance with the Bible shows just how radical abolitionism was. Upon arriving in Newport, Coffin asked his new neighbors why they did not help fugitive slaves, only to learn that "they were afraid of the penalty of the law," a reference to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. [37] This law "enabled a claimant or his representative to seize an alleged fugitive and take such person before a federal judge or state magistrate" and penalized people who assisted a fugitive slave in any way.[38] While not as aggressive as the Fugitive Slave Law in the Compromise of 1850, it still threatened anyone who offered fugitives assistance. Coffin's neighbors, upon seeing Coffin's "success," began to "contribute to clothe the fugitives, and would aid in forwarding them on their way," but they

[35] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 115, 118, 177.
[36] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 118, 230.
[37] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 107.
[38] Carmony, *Indiana 1816-1850*, 564.

remained "timid about sheltering them under their roof" and expressed concern for Coffin's safety and well-being.[39] Coffin even admitted to slaveholders he came across during trips south for his store "it was no part of my business, in the South, to interfere with their laws or their slaves. I was attending to my own affairs and did not intend to busy myself with other matters."[40] When in the south, Coffin's business remained his primary concern. Other abolitionist organizations, when looking at the Society of Friends in the country, also reminded followers that while "a larger proportion of Quakers than of other sects have entered heartily into the anti-slavery cause . . . . The sect, as such, has not been less hostile to the movement than the other so-called religious organizations of the country."[41] Once again, the majority of Indiana Quakers' actions showed their preference to the idea of emancipation, more than the actual freeing of slaves. Few Newport neighbors were as willing as Coffin to support abolition in an active and public way. Even Coffin compartmentalized his abolitionist feelings and was able to put it aside when on southern soil.

Coffin's choice to be an abolitionist in a community that initially hesitated to encourage fugitive slaves demonstrates the majority of Quakers' tentativeness to act on their beliefs against slavery. While some sent letters to Congress demanding the limitation of slavery to its current states and the abolition of slavery in Washington D.C., a larger group looked to gradual emancipation and colonization as a solution that ended slavery while removing any risk from free blacks.[42] "The spirit of colonization and gradual emancipation was deeply seated in the minds of many Friends here," Coffin recalled about all American Quakers.[43] While it would

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[39] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 108.
[40] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 279.
[41] "New Religious Organization." *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, July 6, 1849. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Library of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035487/1849-07-06/ed-1/seq-2/>
[42] Carmony, *Indiana 1816-1850*, 564; Ryan Jordan, "The Indiana Separation of 1842 and the Limits of Quaker Anti-Slavery," *Quaker History* 89, no. 1 (2000): 6.
[43] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 236.

seem that these Quakers only wanted to free slaves and remove them from the country, assisting fugitives headed to Canada would accomplish the same goal. Coffin's actions, however, were met with apprehension. This apprehension came from a concern greater than removing African American slaves from the country; traditional Quakers simply wanted to be removed from direct association with any free blacks and feared freed slaves would make this more difficult. According to Jordan, "many Quakers had always rejected the more radical views regarding black perfectibility and the 'genius of universal emancipation' forwarded by Quaker abolitionists" and the colonization societies were simply the first opportunity they had to join an organization with an alternative to those views.[44]

Coffin offered Newport a new radical perspective on abolitionism, and as a result he became a part of a growing abolitionist "threat" that resulted in a split between the abolitionists and the Yearly Meeting of Indiana in 1842. As the nation continued to deal with rising tensions between the North and South, Quakers, instead of being unified against slavery, began to waver in their stance against the institution. While not directly influenced by it, Coffin and other abolitionists were aware of the political movements pushing immediate abolition in the East. Quaker immediate abolitionists in America became more radical in their claims, wanting to integrate free blacks into society, religiously as well as socially, by giving them the tools to function in the communities. Dealing with race prejudice as well as slavery, Indiana contained its share of radical abolitionist leaders such as Coffin, newspaper publisher and minister Charles Osborn, and Henry H. Way, physician and abolitionist newspaper editor.[45] Together, these men along with other abolitionist Quakers worked to bring the Indiana Yearly Meeting to the abolitionist side and, as they saw it, make Quakers practice the faith they preached. The group

[44] Jordan, "Indiana Separation," 6.
[45] Jordan, "Indiana Separation," 6-8; Huff, "Unnamed Heroes," 136.

believed that "an effort should be made to enlighten the minds of the people, and to advance the cause of immediate and unconditional emancipation on Christian principles."[46] They focused on education and conversation, hoping to persuade in a peaceful and loving way.

The abolitionists were not able to convince fellow Quakers of their beliefs, and their failure proved how unwilling most Indiana Quakers were to expand their anti-slavery beliefs to embrace the needs of free blacks in their community and create the possibility of more free blacks by immediate abolition of slavery. Before the Indiana Yearly Meeting had a chance to split, the Baltimore Yearly Meeting in Maryland issued a statement in 1842 that called on Quakers to distance themselves from slavery and from abolition. They determined that Friends should "study to be quiet and mind their own business," by disassociating from abolitionists to avoid concern for their "safety as individuals and as a Society."[47] The very people praised by some for their assistance in freeing slaves and opposing restrictions against them were now taking a distant approach to slavery, and most Indiana Quakers agreed.

As the abolitionists increasingly associated their activities with the Indiana Yearly Meeting by organizing in meetinghouses and as tensions against abolitionists grew across the country, the moderate Quakers increasingly opposed the abolitionists and drew further away from supporting any black rights or immediate abolition. While separating from undesirable connotations associated with abolition, Quakers also distanced themselves from both the very people their faith demanded be freed and from Friends who supported their immediate freedom. Coffin pointed out how the abolitionists "had no new doctrine to preach; we advocated immediate and unconditional emancipation as we had done all our lives. This we understood to

[46] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 224.
[47] *Richmond Palladium* as cited by Jordan, "Indiana Separation," 14.

be the doctrine and testimony of the Society of Friends for generations past."[48] As early as 1840, however, the Indiana Yearly Meeting advised its members to "keep to themselves." When prompted with abolition, the Quakers would reply, "We are advised against going with others by our yearly meeting," meaning they would not join the abolitionist cause. A writer for the newspaper *The Emancipator* concluded that this behavior was "excusing for their refusing to help."[49] By 1841, the Yearly Meeting closed meetinghouses to anti-slavery meetings and denounced the abolitionists' publications; one by one, ties between the Indiana Yearly Meeting and immediate emancipation were cut.[50] The "Indiana Yearly Meeting was down on all [of the anti-slavery's] movements and used its legislative authority to put it down, opening the breach wider and wider," remembered Daniel Huff, Newport resident and friend to Coffin.[51] Concerned about disturbance of their peaceful lives, as exhibited by the slave hunters who moved through Indiana towns, moderate Hoosier Quakers separated themselves and their organization from the abolitionists.

Anti-slavery Friends only emphasized how unlikely most Quakers were to fight for black political freedom. In 1842, politician and colonization supporter Henry Clay came to speak in Richmond, Indiana, where the Indiana Yearly Meeting resided. A group of abolitionists presented a petition asking the politician to free his slaves.[52] The crowd would not have it, and collectively agreed with Clay that it was "none of your business" what others did with their

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[48] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 231.
[49] "From the Philanthropist Indiana Yearly Meeting of Friends," *The Emancipator*, May 22, 1840, America's Historical Newspapers (11B9694369F3B730).
[50] Jordan, "Indiana Separation," 13.
[51] "Levi Coffin: letter from the famous underground railroad agent, written on the day John Brown was executed," *Richmond Palladium*, 1888, Indiana Collection, Indiana State Library.
[52] Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse*, 52-3.

slaves.[53] This event and the split that came almost immediately afterwards only emphasized the minority position of abolitionists within Indiana Quakerism.

The final step before the split of Indiana Quakers was the expulsion of eight abolitionists Friends. The Meeting for Sufferings[54] met in 1842, right before the Indiana Yearly Meeting, and "after a time of solid consideration" decided "that Henry H. Way, Benj[amin] Stanton, John Shugart, Jacob Grave, William Lock, Charles Osborn, George Shugart, and Isam Puckett have become disqualified for usefulness in this body . . . . We unite in believing that fuller care will be necessary, which we submit to the Meeting."[55] Surprisingly, Coffin was not among those removed, perhaps due to his national recognition. Stanton ran the *Free Labor Advocate* paper and Charles Osborn was an abolitionist pastor.[56] Their regional influence might have been the reason behind their removal instead of Coffin's. After these men were removed at the official Meeting, they, along with other Quaker abolitionists, held their own meeting at Newport in February 1843 to decide what action to take next. The split was made official once the immediate abolitionist Quakers decided "if they were to maintain their principles on slavery, a separate business body must be organized."[57] They could no longer align their values with those of the whole Friends community.

These abolitionists became the Anti-Slavery Friends, a group that protested racial inequalities and actively supported the abolition of slavery and assistance to fugitive slaves. Although centered in Newport, all Newport Quakers did not "become 'separatists,' but…they

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[53] Henry Clay as cited by Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse*, 53.
[54] A committee of Quaker Yearly Meetings, the Meeting for Sufferings analyzed the state of the Society of Friends and reported back any findings or decisions at the annual meeting. (Minutes of the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Friends).
[55] Copies of Minutes for the Meeting for Sufferings, Box 2, Folder 5, Huff-Nixon Papers, Friends Collection and College Archives, Earlham College Libraries.
[56] Huff, "Unnamed Heroes," 136, 139.
[57] No. 2 Notes, Box 2, Folder 4, Huff-Nixon Papers, Friends Collection and College Archives, Earlham College Libraries.

permitted them to attach their building to each end of their own meetinghouse."[58] The group was always the minority in Indiana and among Indiana's Quakers, just as they were the minority across the country.[59] Once separated, Anti-Slavery Friends had to reach out beyond Indiana in order to gain support, appealing to "members of the minority" who "sympathized with us who had dared to stand firm in the cause of the oppressed and suffering slave."[60] A newspaper in New York City disparaged the Indiana Yearly Meeting for turning against abolition, asking all Quakers "how can this 'most righteous cause' spread in the Friends' neighborhood, where the very leaders of the society are taking advantage of the prejudice of the times to kill it before it has time to breathe?"[61] Coffin too felt that "friends in America, as a body, had fallen into the popular current and denounced abolitionism," and forced the abolitionists to go their own way.[62]

Coffin and the Indiana Anti-Slavery Friends were not the only group of Quakers to conclude that the mainstream Society of Friends no longer provided them the religious experience they needed. In 1849 a group of Quakers from New York held a meeting "to form a Religious Society free from the bigotry of creed." After discussing the group's stance on slavery, temperance, war, and other major Quaker concerns, the group developed a "general address" that set "forth the views of the meeting in relation to these subjects, and defin[ed] the position of Congregational Friends."[63] Ten years after Indiana split over the slavery issue, Pennsylvania created a Society of Progressive Friends to promote their abolitionist agenda.[64] Other abolitionists outside the Society of Friends felt that Quakers everywhere were contradicting themselves and their faith, and the Anti-Slavery Friends and Congregational Friends needed to

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[58] No. 2 Notes.
[59] Jordan, "Indiana Separation," 16-7.
[60] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 236.
[61] "From the Philanthropist."
[62] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 236.
[63] "New Religious Organization."
[64] Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), 80.

separate if they wanted to avoid being a part of a "damaging" institution to abolition. But elsewhere in America, as in Indiana, the abolitionist group was in the minority.

After expelling Quaker immediate abolitionists, the Indiana Yearly Meeting also became less anti-slavery. Before the split, traditional Quakers were concerned with the secular world's politics associating with the Society of Friends. These reservations sparked their immediate separation from Quaker-run abolitionist newspapers.[65] At the same 1842 meeting where the eight abolitionists were expelled, the Yearly Meeting published an "Epistle of Advice" warning "all our dear friends against joining, or participating in, the excitement and over-active zeal of the anti-slavery societies, and to be cautious about the kind of reading admitted into their families, as the effect of all those books and papers must be pernicious which have a tendency to set one part of society against another."[66] After the split, the Yearly Meeting cut almost all ties to African Americans and clung onto the forbiddance of slavery alone. Protests against Black Codes and racism stopped.[67] Concerned with political implications, the Indiana Yearly Meeting hurried to keep Quakers away from abolitionist influence, reaching drastic measures such as proposing a book ban on anything supporting the abolitionist cause.

While the Anti-Slavery Friends started out strong, the group was never able to survive its low membership and lack of adherence to rules. At the first meeting of the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Anti-Slavery Friends, there were already signs of problems. There were only four quarterly meetings, or smaller groups within the larger Yearly Meeting. A major tenant required boycotting slaver goods, yet the meeting found that "Friends bear a testimony against slavery,

[65] Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse*, 50.
[66] "Minutes of the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Friends," September 29, 1842, Friends Collection and College Archives, Earlham College Libraries.
[67] Jordan, "Indiana Separation," 20.

except some have not been sufficiently careful to abandon the use of slave grown produce."[68] In the epistle describing the Anti-Slavery Friends' views and purpose, the group remarked how "the African slave trade" and "the system of slavery…are supported chiefly by those who profess to be opposed to their existence; for the products of the slaves' labor are mostly paid for, and consumed, by such."[69] Although boycotting such products was a major tenant to their new organization, from the start the Anti-Slavery Friends struggled to make all members adhere to it. They also regretted the split in the first place, remarking at the end of their first meeting in 1843 how "it is indeed to us a sorrowful circumstance that we have been driven to the necessity of separating ourselves from the original organization."[70] Throughout its existence, the Anti-Slavery Meeting of Friends' organization mirrored the organization of the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Friends with separate committees to report on the state of the meeting, finances, education, and African Americans. For the most part, they ran the same as well; the most prominent difference was the Anti-Slavery Friends' constant insistence that members only purchase free labor goods.[71] They also had the ability to support free blacks financially with about $390 in modern day currency, and remained optimistic in their religious reasons for separating. The epistle written during the first meeting remarked, "The language of our holy Redeemer…leads to a very different conclusion. 'I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.'"[72]

By 1855, twelve years after the organization's inception, problems intensified. More members were hesitant about their membership and slave labor products were bought widely

[68] "Minutes of the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Anti-Slavery Friends," September 4, 1843, Indiana Collection, Indiana State Library; Minutes of the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Anti-Slavery Friends, October 1, 1857, Indiana Collection, Indiana State Library.
[69] "Minutes of the Anti-Slavery Friends," 1843.
[70] "Minutes of the Anti-Slavery Friends," 1843.
[71] "Minutes of the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Anti-Slavery Friends," October 4, 1855, Indiana Collection, Indiana State Library.
[72] "Minutes of the Anti-Slavery Friends," 1843.

among Anti-Slavery Friends.[73] At their last gathering in 1857, they were far less hopeful. One by one, they listed closed monthly and quarterly meetings. Once the last open meeting, Northern Quarter, requested permission to discontinue, the meeting "thereupon taking into consideration the state and condition of our Society…came to the painful conclusion that our organization cannot be maintained consistent with the regulations of Discipline, and therefore to drop it after the close of the present meeting, and come together no more in the capacity of a Yearly Meeting." After electing members to close the group officially, "the meeting then came to a solemn conclusion."[74] The Anti-Slavery Friends simply did not have enough support or members to continue as more and more Quakers returned to the official body.

By this time, the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Friends made a few concessions to their previous policy of no public actions for free blacks. As soon as the Anti-Slavery Friends separated in 1843, the Indiana Yearly Meeting "ceased to prosecute the proscriptive measures" with which the abolitionists disagreed in order to retain some of its members.[75] By 1858 the Committee on the Concerns of the People of Color recommended "petitioning the next Legislature of the State of Indiana, to allow Persons of Color the privilege of testifying in courts of justice." The petition was produced during the meeting and was made "under a sense of religious duty."[76] While no mention of a reunion with the Anti-Slavery Friends or sudden change of heart towards abolition was mentioned in the minutes, the Indiana Society of Friends had room to change in the years before the Civil War.

With the close of the Anti-Slavery Friends and the two groups officially melded back into one, moderate Yearly Meetings largely ignored the abolitionists' demands. "The two Yearly

[73] "Minutes of the Anti-Slavery Friends," 1855.
[74] "Minutes of the Anti-Slavery Friends," 1857.
[75] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 232.
[76] Minutes of the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Friends, September 5, 1858, Indiana Collection, Indiana State Library: 34, 47.

Meetings continued their separate organizations for thirteen years, but a reunion was finally effected, to the rejoicing of many hearts on both sides," wrote Coffin, although he had moved to Cincinnati ten years earlier to open a free-goods operation in the city.[77] Reunification was a gradual coming together and came after the steady decline of membership in the Anti-Slavery Friends.[78] Once the Yearly Meeting began to associate itself with the Republican Party in the 1850s, Anti-Slavery Friends became more confident in the organization's ability to respect their desire for abolition. Despite the many abolitionist leaders who "still expressed anger over the fact that the Indiana Yearly Meeting officially maintained that they had treated the abolitionist leaders and the 'Anti-Slavery cause just right,'" the reconsolidation occurred since "such leaders did not want to preside over a dwindling sect."[79] Anti-Slavery Friends also had hope for their cause in Indiana, and by 1857 Coffin felt that the end of slavery was near, even if it may "end in blood."[80] Satisfied with toleration and optimist, and unable to sustain a separate organization, abolitionists rejoined the Indiana Yearly Meeting.

The Indiana Yearly Meeting, whole once again, banded Quakers together under the banner of opposing slavery as a moral evil, but they still lacked an official stance on racial equality. As long as African Americans were slaves they could count on the sympathies and assistance from a few Indiana Quakers. As soon as those slaves attempted escape or became free, however, that support faltered as a majority of Quakers succumbed to legal and social pressures to remain separate from free blacks. Quakers fell victim to societal norms sweeping across the nation, turning against the very people their faith previously aligned with when it became too dangerous to do so. Not even the Friends, the people who had outlawed slavery among their own

[77] Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 230, 272.
[78] Jordan, "Indiana Separation," 22; Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse*, 59.
[79] Jordan, "Indiana Separation," 22.
[80] Levi Coffin as cited by Jordan, "Indiana Separation," 22.

people and truly believed it was an evil institution, extended equality to free blacks. Not even Levi Coffin, who rescued thousands of slaves through his Newport home, could fully understand the hardships of African Americans. Only after Quakers, along with other white Americans, listened to the wants and needs of African Americans during the Civil War and Reconstruction eras would they begin to understand their role in spreading equality throughout the country.

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