

Transcript for Quakers and Reparations

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

reparations, quakers, question, meeting, friends, Philadelphia, racial justice, enslaved, Green Street Meeting, manumissions, conversation

SPEAKERS

Martin Kelley, Greg Woods, Rob Peagler, Lucy Duncan, Peterson Toscano, Avis Wanda McClinton

Opening

Peterson Toscano 00:00

In this episode of **Quakers Today** we ask, *What are your thoughts, feelings and understandings about reparations?* Avis Wanda McClinton talks about Manumissions and her mission to identify the Africans enslaved by Quakers in Philadelphia. And to explore questions about reparations, we feature Lucy Duncan and Rob Peagler. I'm Peterson Toscano. This is the third episode of **Quakers Today**, a project of Friends Publishing Corporation. The first season of **Quakers Today** is sponsored by Quaker Voluntary Service.

Quakers and Reparations with Lucy Duncan and Rob Peagler

Peterson Toscano 00:35

Rob Peagler and Lucy Duncan are the co-founders of *Reparation Works*. Lucy has been involved with groundbreaking reparations work in Philadelphia's Green Street Friends Meeting. Later this month, Lucy and Rob will co-lead an online workshop called Exploring a Quaker Commitment to Reparative Justice. It's sponsored by Pendle Hill Quaker Center in collaboration with the Woodbrook Center in Birmingham, England. I asked Lucy and Rob to tell us about questions that help deepen their understanding of reparations. And I now share with you highlights from our conversation.

Rob Peagler 01:12

The question of what's possible is very fruitful wherever you are in your reparations journey. Whether reparations is new to you, or you're part of the hipster reparationist avant garde. Some people think reparations, and they just think government, 40 acres and a mule. Well, on the federal level there's H.R. 40, legislation to get a commission, that's the truth part of the truth, reparations, and reconciliation.

Lucy Duncan 01:39

In California, where there is a task force looking at reparations, which is really powerful. Their report is really powerful. There was a campaign to return Bruce Beach, which was owned by African Americans and taken by eminent domain, to return Bruce Beach to the African American family that owned it, and now they have it back and they're leasing that beach to the city. People say it's not possible, but when you actually look and say, "what could be possible?" let's look at that instead. I think it's a really powerful tool.

Lucy Duncan 02:12

Actually, Quakers were called to offer reparations in 1969 by the Black economic conference and deliberated and deliberated and deliberated. Muhammad Kenyatta was the person who made that call.

He went on a hunger strike and the yearly meeting ended up only paying \$5000 and minuted a commitment to pay \$100,000, which they never paid. Muhammad Kenyatta said, you know, you aren't you aren't honest about your history of racism. And this is an example of it. They chose Quakers because they thought there would be an easy win.

Lucy Duncan 02:43

When we started to talk about reparations at Green Street Meeting, it arose from a long process of deliberating around racial justice. And in the case of Green Street, there was an awareness of Quaker complicity, Quaker complicity with being enslavers. William Penn was an enslaver, and a slave holder, an early slave holder in Philadelphia. And Quakers helped to create the penitentiary system. Then for us it was like, oh, there was a discovery that we had a lot of resources of fairly large, unrestricted reserve. Oh, is the use of our treasures, our monetary resources, is it in line with our commitments, our faith commitments and our racial justice commitments? And it became really obvious that we needed to look at reparations as a way to make it in line with those commitments. What Green Street did first was create a legal clinic to support Black homeowners in securing their housing wealth in the context of Green Street, Black members of the meeting are determining the use of those funds. And that will be the beginning. That's just the first year.

Rob Peagler 03:55

There are a lot of things that are already going on, that are inspiring and can be copied. And just that question, like we don't know yet what's possible, and instead of being overwhelmed, like we're creating what's possible right now.

Peterson Toscano 04:07

At this point of the conversation, I felt both inspired and skeptical. I attend a small Quaker Meeting in rural Pennsylvania. Green Street Meeting in urban Philadelphia has two things my little Quaker Meeting does not. For one, Green Street has a lot of people of color, but my meeting, well, like many Quaker meetings in the USA, all or nearly all of the members and attenders are white. And two Green Street already had money in reserve to draw upon. My meeting definitely does not have a financial reserve. Even without paid staff we struggle each year just to pay the bills in order to keep the meeting running. What is a relatively poor predominantly white small meeting able to do?

Rob Peagler 05:01

So in imagining a hypothetical, small Quaker meeting that's white and individually and collectively does not have material resources, and they have no idea what to do. One thing that comes to mind is the idea of anti racism beginner's mind that they're starting at a great place. They're not showing up with money and resources and feeling that they're being driven by easy saviorhood.

Lucy Duncan 05:27

Using principles of like getting connected to your local indigenous folks or your local Black folks and really thinking about what's needed and what how you can come along without work. To me there's a there's an embodiment of accompaniment, that is elemental to reparations that you're working alongside people. What are the needs? What are the things in my sphere that I have influence over? Or that I can support in, in moving money? I'm middle class. I think about using my wealth in reparative ways. But I think that's limited. So what am I connected to, like Green Street, like the Mayor's Commission, so that I can influence other other work of repairing reparations? And also just what does it mean day by day to live a reparative life when people say they want to work for racial justice? I'm like,

what does that mean? And for me, reparations is a really powerful answer to what does it mean to work for racial justice?

Peterson Toscano 06:31

You just heard an edited excerpt from a 45 minute conversation I had with Rob Peagler and Lucy Duncan. Together they founded *Reparation Works*. You will learn more about reparations and what is possible by visiting their website, www.reparation.works. In the January 2023 issue of Friends Journal, you can read Lucy's article, *Reparations and Transgenerational Healing*. It's also available over at www.friendsjournal.org. You will find an article about Green Street Meeting and the remarkable steps they have taken to bring about reparative justice to their community. Gabbreell James writes about Green Streets reparation work in her article, *The Road We Walked*.

Peterson Toscano 07:21

To hear the complete conversation I had with Rob and Lucy, visit Quakerstoday.org. There you will find a link in our show notes.

Avis, Wanda McClinton, Quaker Slavery and Manumissions

Peterson Toscano 07:32

In producing this episode, I learned a new word--Manumission. And to give a definition of it, David Satin Lopez explained the word in a Friends Journal interview.

"A Manumission is a legal document that promises to free someone who is enslaved. In this context, we're talking about American chattel slavery. These records were turned over to the Yearly Meetings and the quarterly meetings which is why we have them."

The Quaker and Special Collections Archive at Haverford College contains documents for 339 enslaved Africans who were freed between 1765 and 1790 by slaveholding Families in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Avis Wanda McClinton is the founder of the 339 Manumissions and Beyond Project. Her leading is to discover what happened to these 339 Children of God and to find their descendants. Last year, Avis Wanda McClinton had a conversation about manumissions with Martin Kelley, the senior editor of Friends Journal,

Avis Wanda McClinton 08:44

It was a lot of effort, Martin to not talk about Quaker heritage of slaveholding. It wasn't by accident that the Quaker mystique is of abolitionists. Like they like jump over the part of enslavement. You know, the real nitty gritty. Yeah, and, and now we're here.

Martin Kelley 09:12

And on that paper paper, it's like fill in the blank. It's like here's someone's life and we have a fill in the blank Manumission sheet and all we see is Jack, someone named Jack. And that's that's all we know. And we know nothing about who he loved, who his kids were, who his parents were, where he came from in Africa. We know nothing nothing of that and we don't know what happened to him. From just all we have just this little slip of paper. It's amazing

09:38

There are for real honest to God records in these Quaker archives, but nobody ever thought to look. To think that these people that see the God and everybody, they never thought to know and see were they slavers. And all this time that my little thing that I'm trying to do honoring those known only to God, to find the enslaved people that were held bondage by the Quakers, they're there. How dare you keep them in the dark? Because they amassed so much wealth for the enslavers, for America, and for the world. They didn't get none of that credit. And here I am now, trying to do my little thing when I find each place to have a memorial to give them just a little bit of dignity. I read all these names and read all these papers and and had to sit with myself with this information, with this real information. I broke down. I cried like a baby. I cried like, like when my mother died in the hospital. 339 people of the enslaved that Quakers got extremely wealthy for this is a pittance

Peterson Toscano 11:11

And that was an excerpt from the YouTube video Avis, Wanda McClinton, Quaker Slavery and Manumissions. You can view the entire conversation at the Friends Journal YouTube page. In the January 2023 issue of Friends Journal, you will find Avis Wanda's article *Confronting the Legacy of Quaker Slavery*. It's also available online. Visit Quakers today.org to find all these links and more in our show notes.

Book Review

Peterson Toscano 11:41

In reading last month's issue of Friends Journal I learned about a book I definitely want to get my hands on. It's called *Overground Railroad, the Green Book and the Roots of Black Travel in America*. It's written by Candacy Taylor. Reviewer Paul Buckley writes, "This book is about the Green Book, one annual travelers guidebook, but so much more. It is the story of a lost civilization, one that deserves to be lost but never forgotten. It tells the story of Black resistance to white repression, harassment, and tyranny. It tells about a subversive project, one that was designed to subvert Jim Crow, but also contributed to the subversion of legal segregation and the denial of basic civil rights." The book is *Overground Railroad, the Green Book and the Roots of Black Travel in America* by Candacy Taylor. It was published by Abrams Press.

Peterson Toscano 12:40

Thank you for listening to this episode of **Quakers Today** and many thanks to the people who have been leaving us reviews over at Apple Podcasts. That means a lot. **Quakers Today** is produced by me Peterson Toscano. You will see our show notes with links and a full transcript over at Quakerstoday.org If you have a comment, suggestion, or you just want to say hi, you can email me podcast@friendsjournal.org.

Peterson Toscano 13:08

And many thanks to our sponsor Quaker Voluntary Service. Are you between 21 to 30 years old? Are you looking for community and purpose driven work? Consider applying to QVS. They have a year long Fellowship for Young Adults. Fellows work at nonprofits while building community and exploring Quakerism. Applications are open through February 28 2023. Visit www.Quakervoluntaryservice.org/ apply and follow QVS on Instagram at Quakervoluntaryservice.

Thank you, friend. I look forward to spending more time with you soon.

Monthly Question

Peterson Toscano 13:53

So now it's time for me to share some voicemails, and I think maybe the question may have been a bit intimidating. The question was, "What are your thoughts feelings and understandings about reparations?" It's a deep and important question, but one that may be hard to answer in a short voicemail. I will share with you the one response I did get but before I do, here is the question for next month. It's a question about your faith journey. "How is your view of Jesus, God, or religion changed since you were young?: This question is raised in Margaret Kelso is article about Lent which will appear in the February 2023 issue of Friends Journal. "How has your view of Jesus, God, or religion changed since you were young?"

Peterson Toscano 14:42

Let me think about this one. So I was raised Catholic and Lent was a big deal in our family. We were encouraged every year to give up something for Lent, which is 40 days. One time I suggested I would give up eating broccoli for Lent; that didn't go down so well. Father Justin explained to me that Lent was about sacrifice and denying the body bad things it craved. And I guess that's how I saw Jesus back in those days, as an example of someone who denied worldly pleasures. These days as a Quaker, I don't really practice Lent anymore. But I do a lot of work around climate change, and I see a movement now about decarbonizing our lifestyles every Lent. How can I how can you live a less carbon intensive life? And I guess if we're thinking about repenting of sin, I never would have thought of pollution as a sin back in those days. But that has definitely changed from when I was a child. And I don't think I've ever actually articulated this before.

Peterson Toscano 15:45

So I'm glad for the question. So what about you? "How have your views of Jesus, God ,or religion changed since you were young? I'd love to hear and share what you have to say. Leave a voice memo with your name and the town where you live. The number to call is 317 Quakers. That's 317.782.5377. 317 Quakers. +11 if you're calling from outside the USA. And don't be nervous, it's okay. You can call multiple times if you feel like you messed up on the first try. Don't worry about it. It's fine. Just leave a message. You can also send an email. I have these contact details in our show notes over at Quakers today.org. Now we hear an answer to the question. What are your thoughts feelings and understandings about reparations?

Greg Woods 16:38

Greg Woods, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Quakers need to talk about reparations and our recent history of offering, unpaid, low paid internships at our Quaker organizations to BIPOC youth, and the acknowledgement of unpaid underpaid labor they offer their white supervisors during that time. and and how they should provide, had been benefited in that unpaid, underpaid labor. Thank you