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Chapter 4

Benezet's Most Explicit Influence

While Benezet's antislavery influence touched many individuals, both inside and beyond Quaker circles, the power and efficacy of his influence can be seen most succinctly in the lives of three British antislavery activists, Granville Sharp, John Wesley and Thomas Clarkson. These three comprise a powerful and multifaceted voice from the latter part of the eighteenth century into the 1830s. Sharp represents a voice that reached the law courts and changed the legal position in England. Wesley became a prophetic voice to the mushrooming evangelical movement in England and America. Clarkson worked behind the scenes as a researcher and correspondent to make possible the eventual Parliamentary overthrow of both the slave trade and slavery.

Granville Sharp, 1735-1813, the foremost advocate for Africans in England, lived a full generation before slavery and the slave trade became agenda items in Parliament. It was his work that began to attract public, legal and parliamentary attention to the slave cause. He was drawn into the cause through a chance meeting with a slave named Jonathan Strong. Strong had been worked and abused by his owner to the point that he was considered financially worthless, and then abandoned. Fortunately, he was given charity medical assistance by Granville's physician brother. With proper care, attention and time for recuperation Strong's health and strength were restored. The Sharp brothers found employment for him as a courier for a chemist (pharmacist). Before long, his owner, David Lisle, happened to discover Strong now in good health and once again a viable, profitable "property." Lisle arranged for his sale to a Jamaican plantation owner and Strong was placed in a prison until he could be sent to the West Indies.

At this point Granville's involvement intensified. Strong contacted him from prison and Sharp's sense of justice motivated him to work for the release of this unjustly imprisoned individual. He succeeded and published his work

connected with the case in 1769, *A Representation of the Injustice and dangerous Tendency of tolerating Slavery in England*.

From this time Sharp became deeply entangled in the complex legal issue of securing freedom for numerous runaway London slaves and in the much broader question of the legality of slavery in England. It is estimated that there were some 15,000 slaves and free blacks in England at the time.³⁵ He was tenacious and worked tirelessly on behalf of Africans. He succeeded in gaining freedom for several slaves, largely on the grounds of inadequate legal documentation held by their owners. Sharp hoped for an opportunity to bring before the court a case that would address the primary issue of slavery, rather than the technicalities of paperwork. He sought to confront the British public with the moral implications of slavery, rather than focus mainly upon isolated cases of slavery.

The occasion for launching his crusade occurred in 1772. James Somerset, a Virginia slave who had run away while in England, was recaptured. This time the legal documents were in order. The judicial focus would not be a secondary issue, but the actual question of whether a slave in England could be deported against his will. Of course, underlying the question of deportation was the larger principle of enslaving human beings. The case was being tried in the Court of the King's Bench and the judge was Lord Mansfield. Fully aware of the larger implications of the outcome of the trial, he delayed and encouraged a settlement out of court. Sharp would not hear of that and eventually Mansfield ruled in favor of the slave. Technically, this was not a conclusive legal ruling against all slavery in England, rather it initiated movement in that direction and established a kind of precedent. It produced a shift in the general opinion against slavery in England and served as a practical landmark case. Mansfield's decision was based on his opinion that slavery was so "odious" that it could not be supported even by positive law.

This was a clear victory for Sharp and the antislavery cause; Sharp was the pivotal influence in this drama because he was the one who persisted in bringing the issue to the court and not backing down.³⁶ He functioned as the director of the case, retaining, instructing, encouraging and corresponding with the five men who served as counsel for Somerset: Serjeants Davy and Glynn, and Mr.

35. Rice, 213.

36. The differing perspectives and conclusions on this important 1772 case vary from this being the landmark case, after which no slavery was legal in England, to its being an isolated, individual trial. Rice (214) states that "Chief Justice Mansfield avoided declaring Somerset free, but confirmed once and for all that any slave, by the act of walking on the soil of England gained the right to remain there." By contrast, Hugh Thomas (476) states that as a result of Mansfield's ruling, "Somerset therefore was set free." It could be argued that by comparison, remaining in England rather than being returned to a plantation was tantamount to freedom. Regardless, it is clear that public opinion was affected and Sharp was the protagonist and the victor. See also Robin Furneaux, *William Wilberforce*, London: Hamish Hamilton, Ltd. 1974, 67-8, and Reginald Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1964, 54.

Mansfield (not to be confused with the judge, Lord Mansfield), Mr. Hargrave and Mr. Alleyne.³⁷

The role Anthony Benezet played in this British development is substantive. How this occurred is best described in Sharp's words: "When G.S. was involved in the first law-suit [. . .] in 1767 [referring to the Jonathan Strong case], he accidentally met with a copy of this book on a stall, and, without any knowledge whatever of the author, caused this edition to be printed and published."³⁸ The book Sharp refers to is almost certainly Benezet's *A Short Account of that Part of Africa Inhabited by the Negroes*, 1762; Sharp specifies that it was "printed at Philadelphia in 1762."³⁹

During the 1772 Somerset case, Sharp's legal battle was helped by Benezet's work. There is evidence that Sharp utilized Benezet's 1771 tract, *Some Historical Account of Guinea*, actually quoting or paraphrasing sections of it in his own 1772 publication, *An Appendix to the Representation against Slavery*.⁴⁰ In fact, during the trial, Sharp requested from Dr. John Fothergill, Quaker and royal physician, additional copies of works by Benezet, both Benezet's abridged version of Sharp's 1769 tract, *A Representation of the Injustice and dangerous Tendency of tolerating Slavery in England* and Benezet's *Some Historical Account*. These were supplied and distributed both to the counsel and to Lord Mansfield.⁴¹ From this time Sharp and Benezet corresponded. It is interesting that both men republished the other's work without permission, as acknowledged in their letters. In 1772 Benezet wrote Sharp, "I had taken the freedom to republish a part of thy acceptable and I trust serviceable treatise" and at the same time he sent Sharp a copy of his 1771 tract, *Some Historical Account*.⁴² Sharp's letter of response indicates not only the fact that he republished Benezet's work, but his approval: "You need not have made an apology for having abridged my book;" he goes on, "I not only approve, sir, of the abridgment you have made of my arguments in particular, but of your whole performance."⁴³

Beyond the influence seen in the direct quotations and republishing of his work, Benezet's influence can also be seen in another way. Here we note his use of Enlightenment precepts, which he put in a form directly applicable to slavery. An example of this can be seen in his use of an argument from Francis Hutcheson. Hutcheson states that the Old Testament requirement of how Jews

37. For a fascinating account of this trial, see chapter IV of Prince Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq.*, London, Henry Colburn and Co., 1820, 69-94. It is interesting that each of the counsel served gratis (83). See also the account supplied by one member of the counsel, Francis Hargrave, *Collection of the State Trials*, especially Vol. XI.

38. Prince Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq.*, 97.

39. Prince Hoare, 97; however, Rice, 215, believes it was Benezet's *Caution and Warning* that Sharp republished. *Caution and Warning* was first published in 1766.

40. For an example of the utilized text, see Sharp, 1772, *An Appendix to the Representation against Slavery*, 25-6 and Benezet, 1771, *Some Historical Account*, 131-32.

41. Prince Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, 81.

42. Letter from Benezet to Sharp, 5th Month, 14th, 1772, in Brookes, 290-93. See complete letter below.

43. Letter from Sharp to Benezet, August 21, 1772, in Brookes, 418-22; See complete letter below.

treat fellow Jews becomes the straight edge for how persons should treat all persons, because in the Christian era the distinction between Jew and Gentile is removed. Not only does Benezet use this Hutcheson concept (actually a quotation), but it later appears in the writings of Granville Sharp, 1776, and James Ramsay, 1788. It is most probable that it was Benezet who passed Hutcheson's argument on to Sharp as well as to Ramsay.⁴⁴

Benezet's writings were used both to share his own ideas and to pass on the ideas of others before him. His works were read and sometimes passed on to others through intermediaries (directly or even via republication without permission). This entire process might be described as a "cascading" effect. The result was that his antislavery influence spread dramatically. A primary example of this process can be seen in the fact that Sharp distributed both his own work as abridged by Benezet, and Benezet's work. A letter from Sharp to Benezet indicates this and also that others were even publishing Benezet's tracts: "Some copies of it [Sharp's *Representation of the Injustice*, abridged by Benezet] arrived here very opportunely, just before the case of James Somerset came to a hearing in the Court of King's Bench; and [. . .] I was enabled immediately to dispose of six: one to Lord Mansfield, the Chief Justice, one to Lord North, first Lord Commissioner of the Treasury; and four to the learned Counsel. . . ." He then adds, "I had thought indeed of reprinting it, as I did your former tract in 1768, but Mr. Clark, the printer, was luckily beforehand with me; so that I had an opportunity of purchasing more copies to distribute."⁴⁵ In a subsequent letter to Benjamin Rush, Sharp indicates that he also gave copies of Benezet's *Some Historical Account* to many people, including several Nobility and all the judges.⁴⁶ Benezet himself indicates that some eight hundred members of Parliament and officers of the crown received copies of his *Caution and Warning to Great Britain*.⁴⁷ It is likely that this distribution was facilitated by Sharp. Not only did the two men collaborate and cooperate, Benezet was, indeed, a significant influence on Sharp.

The next person to be considered is John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. He is another example of the "cascading effect," and was a direct beneficiary of Benezet's work, albeit through Sharp. Wesley was a contemporary of Benezet, born in 1703, ten years before Benezet, and dying in 1791, seven years after Benezet died. There is no evidence that the two men met when Wesley was in America from 1736 to 1738. However, their paths had previously crossed indirectly through the influence of the Moravian friends of Benezet's father, Spangenberg, Böhler and Zinzendorf.

44. See Brendlinger, *A Study of the Views of Major Eighteenth Century Evangelicals on Slavery and Race*, Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Edinburgh, 1982, 164, with references to 84 and 133-35.

45. Letter from Sharp to Benezet, August 21, 1772, in Brookes, 418-22.

46. Letter from Sharp to Benjamin Rush, 21 Feb. 1774, in Brookes, 446-47. See complete letter below.

47. Letter from Benezet to Henry Laurens, 12th month, 1776, in Brookes, 324-25. See complete letter below.

From his journal we know that Wesley was aware of and opposed to slavery during his time in Georgia. While there are occasional comments in his writings in subsequent years, it was not until 1772 that he became actively involved in the fight against slavery. That year he read a specific document about slavery. The experience crystallized his position and initiated his plan of action. He would preach, he would encourage others and he would write to remove this blight on human society. Over the years he corresponded with those in the anti-slavery cause and preached in two strongholds of the slave trade, Liverpool and Bristol. His Bristol experience was unique in that during the sermon there was a sudden uproar of noise, confusion, screaming, violence and the breaking of the benches. Wesley saw the disturbance as Satan's attempt to protect slavery (*his kingdom*) against the threat of Wesley's preaching.⁴⁸

Wesley's most important effort was his tract, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, first published in 1774. Within the first year the tract went through four editions and a fifth was published in 1792.⁴⁹ It reached at least thirteen editions in America in thirty years.⁵⁰ Granville Sharp responded personally to Wesley, complimenting his tract. Sharp also wrote Benezet with praise about the tract and sent two copies to Benjamin Rush, George Washington's Surgeon General. Benezet was pleased enough with the work that he republished it in America. It is reflective of Wesley's prominence, of the import of this tract and its widespread distribution that a copy also found its way into George Washington's library.⁵¹ Because of Wesley's influence, Hugh Thomas boldly asserts that the tract "constituted the most serious onslaught on slavery, as well as the trade, that had yet been made."⁵² This would be true in light of the fact that Wesley's Methodism had swept across England and the new world and because of the unique leadership position and respect Wesley held.

Wesley's interest in fighting slavery continued until his death. His very last letter, written days before his death, was to William Wilberforce, encouraging him in his Parliamentary fight against slavery.⁵³ That was not out of character for Wesley because he had become such a prominent figure and his passion for the cause had not diminished. There is evidence that the spread of Methodism contributed to the huge antislavery petition drive in 1791-2, when one in every eleven adults, some 400,000, signed a petition. Forty years later, just before the

48. See Wesley's Journal, March 3, 4 & 6, 1788, (*Works*, Vol. IV, 408, Jackson edition, 1872).

49. The 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th editions are housed in the John Rylands Library, Manchester, England.

50. Frank Baker, "The Origins, Character, and Influence of John Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery*," *Methodist History*, Vol. 22, January, 1984, 86.

51. John S. Simon, W. H. S. *Proceedings*, Vol. XIII, 1.

52. Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 477.

53. Wesley, *Letters*, Vol. VIII, 264-65, 24 February, 1791, (Telford ed., London, Epworth Press, 1931). A secondary influence by Wesley on William Wilberforce and therefore on antislavery can be surmised, even if not asserted dogmatically. Wilberforce spent some childhood years in the care of an aunt (in Wimbledon), who happened to be a Methodist. It is possible that some of Wilberforce's later values, human rights efforts and antislavery ardor had been filtered through that aunt, traceable to Wesley's influence.

1833 British antislavery victory, 21 percent of the English electorate were religious dissenters; followers of Wesley comprised the majority of that voting bloc.⁵⁴ When the Wesleyan Methodist Church was born in 1843, in America, the use of Wesley's name was intended to indicate that they were the *true* followers of Wesley, in contrast to the more general "Methodists." One of their chief distinguishing traits was unequivocal opposition to slavery, a position American Methodists had softened since Wesley's death. Once aware of the slavery problem, Wesley never wavered in his opposition. Those who believed themselves to be true followers of Wesley would do no less. His view on this topic was an extremely powerful influence both during his life and after his death.

But how is Wesley's antislavery activity related to Anthony Benezet's influence? Seldom in history can causes be traced definitively, but Wesley's case is an exception. In 1772 Granville Sharp supplied a bundle of antislavery material to Wesley.⁵⁵ In the packet was Benezet's tract, *Some Historical Account* (1771). That was the document which Wesley read and by which he became caught up in the fight against slavery.⁵⁶ His journal reflects his response to reading Benezet: 12 February, 1772, "I read a very different book, published by an honest Quaker, on that execrable sum of all villainies, commonly called the Slave Trade. I read of nothing like it in the heathen world, whether ancient or modern."⁵⁷

Having read "nothing like it," Wesley was deeply moved and from this time he corresponded with both Sharp and Benezet. The seed had been planted and it produced the fruit of his 1774 tract. The directness of Benezet's influence is seen in the fact that more than the first half of Wesley's tract is taken almost word for word from Benezet's 1771 tract.⁵⁸ By present day standards this would be considered plagiarism. In the eighteenth century struggle to extirpate the evil of slavery, it was considered cooperation and the prudent utilization of resources. The fact that Benezet republished Wesley's tract in America is evidence of this. In fact, Benezet sent copies to numerous people, including his former student and now antislavery activist, William Dillwyn. Granville Sharp, who

54. Robert William Fogel, *The Rise and fall of American Slavery, Without Consent or Contract*, New York, Norton, 1989, 212 and 230 respectively.

55. Anstey, 240, referring to a letter from Sharp to Benezet housed in the Sharp Transcripts, (J.A.W.), January 7, 1774; see below, 74.

56. Wesley, *Works*, Vol. III, 453, 12 February, 1772, Jackson edition, London, Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872.

57. Wesley, *Works*, Vol. III, 453. (Journal) It brings a smile to read Wesley's term, "honest Quaker." While some word connections are considered to be oxymorons (eg. "honest lawyer"), because of the Quaker commitment to "plain truth" the term "honest Quaker" might be considered a redundancy. Certainly Benezet would have considered it so, but obviously not Wesley. This might well be Wesley's way of commending a member of a group, the Quakers, he normally would not commend.

58. See Frank Baker's "The Origins, Character, and Influence of John Wesley's Thoughts Upon Slavery," in *Methodist History*, Vol. 22, January, 1984, 75-86. See also Brendlinger, forthcoming book, *Social Justice Through the Eyes of Wesley, John Wesley's Theological Challenge to Slavery*.

knew Benezet's work very well also sent copies to Benjamin Rush.⁵⁹ Benezet's earlier description of Wesley as "my friend,"⁶⁰ does not seem to have changed. In November, 1774, when Wesley wrote a short piece for the *Monthly Review*, he included American newspaper advertisements for runaway slaves. He had received these from Benezet.⁶¹ Wesley's entering the slave cause and most of his antislavery activity were the direct result of one predominant influence, Anthony Benezet. Fifteen years after his first reading of Benezet, he would still reflect, "I have long wished for the rolling away of this reproach [slavery] from us, a reproach not only to religion, but to humanity itself. Especially when I read Mr. Benezet's tracts. . . ."⁶² If Wesley was crucial to "the most serious onslaught" on slavery, and if Benezet was his predominant influence, Benezet's placement in the entire drama looks increasingly like a keystone.

An interesting observation gives insight into both the significance of Benezet and the passion with which such men (Benezet, Sharp and Wesley) confronted the evil of slavery. In the fly-leaf of a Benezet tract that Sharp owned is a comment penned by Sharp. He lamented that Benezet was "unhappily involved in the errors of Quakerism."⁶³ At another time, after reading Benezet's essay on Quakerism, Sharp wrote to counter his views of baptism and prayer, but never sent the letter due to Benezet's death.⁶⁴ The fact that Sharp would utilize the work of one involved in what he considered to be a heretical sect, gives evidence that Benezet was greatly respected and influential regarding slavery, in spite of his Quakerism. Further, it demonstrates that the importance of the slave cause transcended important doctrinal differences.

A similar response to Quakerism was held by Wesley at points in his life. Early in his ministry he considered Quakers to be a sect. Comments throughout his journal and other writings indicate that he considered some of their beliefs and practices to be at least unwise, and at worst, unchristian. Wesley questioned the Quaker views of scripture and sacraments.⁶⁵ However, later in his life Wesley changed his assessment about Quakers, showing them great respect. He noted that his Methodists would be much healthier had he applied some of the

59. See Benezet's letter to John Pemberton, 10th 8th month, 1783 (Brookes, 396, and below in this Volume) and Sharp's letter to Benjamin Rush (Brookes, 446, and also in this Volume).

60. Letter from Benezet to Sharp, 5th Month, 14th, 1772, Brookes, 290-93, also below.

61. See Benezet's letter to Wesley, 23 May, 1774, *The Arminian Magazine*, Vol. X, 1787, and in Brookes, 318-21; complete letter below.

62. Letter from Wesley to Samuel Hoare, August 18, 1787, in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* edited by John Telford, The Epworth Press, 1831, Vol. VII, 275. This letter is included below.

63. Prince Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, Henry Colburn and Co., London, 1820, 97.

64. Brookes, 151-52. Benezet's 1780 tract (27 pages) was entitled, *A Short Account of the Religious Society of Friends, Commonly Called Quakers*.

65. See Wesley's 1747 "Letter to a Person Lately Joined with the People Called Quakers," *Works*, Vol. X, 177-88 and his 1746 letter to John Smith, *Works*, Vol. XII, 78, also 521, letter to Mary Stokes, 1772.

disciplines and practices of Quakers. In his 1789 sermon, "Causes of the Inefficiency of Christianity," Wesley laments the lack of self denial among Methodists. This is seen in their not giving all they can to help others and in other areas. Looking back, he states,

I see what I might have done once. I might have said peremptorily and expressly, "Here I am: I and my Bible. I will not, I dare not, vary from this book, either in great things or small." [. . .] "Who will meet me on this ground? Join me on this, or not at all." With regard to dress, in particular, I might have been as firm (and I now see it would have been far better) as either the people called Quakers, or the Moravian Brethren. . . .⁶⁶

In terms of living simply in order to give, Wesley felt he should have upheld the standard among his followers rather than acquiescing in order to build larger membership numbers. One wonders if Wesley's relationship with Benezet was a large piece of his change in attitude. His respect for this man who deeply affected his view and facilitated his action against slavery could not but carry over to his feelings about their shared faith.

As interesting as it is to note Sharp's and Wesley's responses to Benezet's Quakerism, it is equally intriguing to glimpse his response to their religion. Both men were members of the Church of England, which Benezet would have considered as not fully embracing truth. Wesley had departed, or at least exceeded the constraints of Anglicanism and might therefore be considered by Benezet in a more positive light. It is interesting to note that Benezet's personal library contained a number of Wesley's books, including his *Works* (12 volumes), *Primitive Physick* (medical book),⁶⁷ *Free Grace*, Wesley's sermon against predestination in reaction to Whitefield's sermon supporting predestination, and several editions of Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery*. It also included a piece called *Reasons for Quitting the Methodist Society*.⁶⁸ Thus, it appears that Benezet regarded Wesley and his theology positively.

Regarding Sharp, Benezet reveals his thoughts about Sharp's religious practice and attitude in a letter to Caspar Wistar,

I am not insensible of his attachment to the outward practices of the Church, in the support of which, in opposition to our simple mode of worship &c he is rather more possitive [sic], & somewhat tart, than I should have expected from one of so much sense & charity. I have avoid [sic] any altercation on these points; sensible that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision; neither forms, nor the omission of them will avail, but a change from the natural corruption of the heart, the selfishness, revenge &c to a frame of humility & love. I trust his

66. Wesley, *Works*, Vol. VII, 287 ff.

67. Haverford Archives hold Benezet's copy of Wesley's *Primitive Physick* with Benezet's signature on the title page.

68. Henry J. Cadbury, "Anthony Benezet's Library," in *Bulletin of Friends Historical Association*, Vol. XXIII, 1934, 63-75.

good sense & experience will induce him to think of these matters with more leniency, if not favour.⁶⁹

It is remarkable that even though these men were not in agreement on theology or liturgy, they functioned with complete unity, cooperation and interdependence in their work against slavery, and their antislavery work was rooted in their faith. The importance of the cause transcended differences that seemed to be otherwise insurmountable. Their passion for the cause and appreciation for fellows in that cause brought about a respect and allegiance that was uncommon among those of such strong varying religious convictions. This is testimony to the power of Benezet's influence.

The third person to be considered as a recipient of Benezet's influence is Thomas Clarkson. He was born in 1760 and as a young man he attended Cambridge, preparing for ministry in the Church of England. Although Clarkson's name is not known as broadly as more visible figures such as Wilberforce, his contribution to the cause was the background work that made the more visible work viable. Clarkson served as a writer and the primary researcher for those addressing slavery and the slave trade in Parliament. His work was foundational to that of William Wilberforce and the Abolition Committee.⁷⁰

Clarkson collected data on the slave trade from every possible source. He read extensively, but much of his information came from eyewitnesses, some of whom he persuaded to testify before the Privy Council. He traveled to slave ship ports so he could formally and informally interview captains, sailors, surgeons and others directly involved in the trade. The result was that people began to have access to accurate specifics, previously unknown, rather than misleading, inaccurate rumors. People began to respond in a new way when they could grapple with facts: numbers, specific incidents of torture and death and the details that made the trade function. On one occasion he procured "instruments" of the trade: shackles, a "speculum oris" for force feeding suicidal slaves, and thumb screws. A well known contribution was his revealing drawing (now famous) of a slave ship, graphically showing how the "cargo" of slaves were so tightly packed in the hold.⁷¹ Use of such methods had a strong affect on public opinion. His role was seen as sufficiently challenging to the slave trade that on at least one occasion his life was threatened by an attempt to push him off the dock. Clarkson's experiences, findings and summation of the slave trade were published in his two volume work, *The History of the . . . Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 1808, an invaluable primary source of information about events and persons.⁷²

69. Anthony Benezet to Caspar Wistar, Philadelphia, 25th of 4th month, 1784, Haverford Archives, coll. 852.

70. For an excellent account of Clarkson's work in the antislavery campaign, see Earl Leslie Griggs, *Thomas Clarkson The Friend of Slaves*, George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., London, 1936.

71. Griggs, 48.

72. Published by Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme in London.

Like Wesley, Clarkson had a turning point experience that changed his course, leading him to a life totally involved in working for the antislavery cause. His introduction to the cause came unexpectedly in 1785. The previous year he had entered and won the Cambridge Junior Latin essay contest. As a senior he entered the senior essay contest. The topic was one he knew nothing about: *Anne liceat invitos in servitutum dare?* ("Is it right to enslave others against their will?")⁷³ He began his research, but struggled to find information. While at a friend's home he noticed on the table an advertisement for a book on the topic of slavery and the slave trade. He hurried to the book seller and purchased a copy. It was Benezet's *Some Historical Account* and it proved to be the breakthrough he needed. He states, "In this precious book I found almost all I wanted" for the essay.⁷⁴ He not only came to terms with the reality of slavery, he also won the contest and in the process of having his essay published decided to devote his life to working against slavery.⁷⁵

From that time he continued gathering data. His findings contributed heavily to the 1807 victory when England abolished the Slave Trade, after which he worked toward the next goal to end slavery in British possessions, legislated in 1833, and fulfilled in 1838. He then turned his efforts to slavery in the United States. Clarkson's call to ministry during his Cambridge years became refocused as a very direct ministry to the oppressed African. He fulfilled that ministry effectively, but it all began with an essay contest and discovering Benezet's 1771 tract. Once again, in a very specific way, Benezet's influence is obvious. It was the single factor at the turning point of Clarkson's life, leading him to his life consuming passion.

The lives of these three individuals offer a pointed example of the intersection of circumstances, persons, ideas and actions at the right moment. Had Benezet influenced only one of these persons, Sharp, Wesley or Clarkson, his contribution would have been major and he would be worthy of study. However, he influenced all three and many others. Benezet's life and influence occurred in the "fullness of time."

73. The topic had been selected by Dr. Peter Peckard, St. Johns College, Cambridge. He was a theologian who felt slavery was a crime. See Hugh Thomas, 492 and Anstey, 247.

74. Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the . . . Abolition of the African Slave Trade*, 2 Vols., London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808, Vol. I., 207.

75. Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997, 492.