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## E Pluribus Unum? Quaker Approaches to Plurality and Unity in Pennsylvania 1682-1764

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# *E PLURIBUS UNUM?* QUAKER APPROACHES TO PLURALITY AND UNITY IN PENNSYLVANIA, 1682-1764

STEPHEN W. ANGELL

Pennsylvania was probably the most diverse of the thirteen English colonies that transformed themselves into states in 1776. That this was not an unmixed blessing was something that no less eminent a personage than George Washington testified to:

Pennsylvania is a large state; and from the policy of its founder and the government since, and especially from the celebrity of Philadelphia, has become the general receptacle of foreigners from all countries and of all descriptions, many of whom soon take an active part in the politics of the state; and coming over full of prejudice against their government—some against all governments—you will be able without any comment of mine to draw your own inference of their conduct.<sup>1</sup>

The union of thirteen states, not the internal diversity of Pennsylvania, was likely foremost on the minds of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson when they proposed “*e pluribus unum*,” or “out of many, one,” as the new nation’s motto in 1776.<sup>2</sup> With a question mark, it seems appropriate as a title for an essay examining interactions among Pennsylvania’s English Quakers, Germans, Scotch-Irish, and Lenape Indians. With these four ethnic groups especially in mind, I will ask to what degree Quaker notions of diversity have—or have not—undergirded American democratic understanding of liberty and tolerance.

I agree with Washington that Pennsylvania’s embrace and celebration of diversity can be traced to its Quaker founder. Penn’s holy commonwealth established a pattern of humane laws, above the standards of the time, attracting many who sought freedom, justice and equity. Penn, whose 1670 trial with William Mead helped to establish the right to an uncoerced jury in English law, included trials by “twelve men, and as near as may be, *Peers and Equals*” in his 1682 Frame of Government. The place in Penn’s Frame that most explicitly celebrates diversity is its famous thirty-fifth provision:

That all Persons living in this Province, who confess and acknowledge the One Almighty and Eternal God, to be the Creator, Upholder and Ruler of the World, and that hold themselves obliged in Conscience to live peaceably and justly in *Civil Society*, shall in no wayes be molested or prejudiced for their Religious Perswasion or Practice in matters of *Faith* and *Worship*, nor shall they be compelled at any time to frequent or maintain any Religious Worship, Place, or Ministry whatever.<sup>3</sup>

Thus for Penn, diversity was welcomed explicitly in terms of religion, and it was expressed in the language of liberties. Our contemporary concept of a positive diversity, that we find rooted in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Pennsylvania, seems inextricably tied to understandings of liberty, both theirs and ours.

Penn's vision of community inclusion was not limited to those persons within the bounds of King Charles' grant, who lived under Pennsylvania's laws. It also extended to American Indians living in peaceful proximity to Quakers and other Pennsylvanian settlers. Penn's understanding of community was complex and had different facets. We might recall in this regard his 1693 *Essay towards the Present and Future Peace of Nations*, where he proposed a parliament of nations in order to put an end to war.<sup>4</sup> Penn did not ignore the community of all human beings, seeing the need to design institutions that would be all-inclusive of that humanity. In the American context, his negotiations and treaties with the Lenape, and the broader view of peaceful relations with the Indians that his approach to them signaled, were an important element in creating the diversity that colonial Pennsylvania, and the United States of America, came to embody. Penn's vision of community with the Indians, embodied in his 1681 letter "to the Kings of the Indians," included a broadly religious (theistic but not explicitly Christian) and non-proselytizing element, as well as a practical proposal for matters in dispute between Quakers and Indians to be settled by "an equall number of honest men on both sides."<sup>5</sup>

A revisionist treatment of Penn's relations with the Lenapes, authored by James Spady, argues that the pressures exerted by Europeans for more lands that helped to spark unscrupulous dealings with the Indians were already present while Penn was in Pennsylvania, and that this caused friction between him and Lenape sachems. Further, the Lenape sachems intended only to admit Penn

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to the rights of a sachem, which included regular gift giving, and not to the rights of absolute proprietorship that Penn had envisioned.<sup>6</sup> Some contemporary scholars, however, point out that a revisionist view of Penn's dealings with the Indians can be taken only so far. James Merrill is one who sees much to commend in Penn's example:

While no paragon of modern multiculturalism, William Penn was comparatively flexible in his dealings with Natives. Of England's other colony founders in the seventeenth century, only Roger Williams in Rhode Island comes close to matching Penn's fascination (and respect for) Indian ways, his interest in forging friendships, his vision of an America that might contain Natives as well as newcomers. . . . It pays . . . to remember Penn's words. Certainly the Indians did. . . . Soon after Penn left his province for the last time in 1701, Native diplomats from many nations began talking up (and embellishing) their memories of him. . . . Natives shrewdly used the Proprietor as a tool for insisting that his literal and figurative descendants (his sons, Quakers, and Pennsylvanians in general) live up to the high hopes, the shining ideals of the Indians 'old friend and brother,' William Penn.<sup>7</sup>

An inevitable concomitant to liberty is disagreement. Penn and Quaker colonists of Pennsylvania clashed on such issues as whether Pennsylvanians should have to pay annual sums to the proprietor for the right to work their lands, a payment known as "quitrents." Implying that Penn infringed the liberty of Pennsylvanians, Quaker legislators like David Lloyd championed the interests of the colonists against Penn's proprietary prerogatives. On a different front, George Keith sharply attacked what he saw as the insufficient Christian adherence of Pennsylvania's Quakers, and while his unpleasant personality helped to lead to his ostracism, he also provided enduring leadership in such areas as publishing the first anti-slavery tract in North America. Diversity within Quakerism—proprietor versus settlers, Keithian Christians versus the Orthodox, and eventually Quaker grandees versus modest livers—may have been the first diversity in Pennsylvania really to matter. And the liberty found on the edge of the wilderness helped to make it happen.

A large part of the increasingly sectarian Quaker witness during the eighteenth century seemed positively, if often passively, hostile to the ideal of diversity, at least in its robust, full-flavored twenty-first-century sense. Consider the principle of endogamy, the exclusion from membership in the Religious Society of Friends of those

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Quakers who married an Anglican or a Presbyterian. Thus Anglicans and Presbyterians could live in Pennsylvania, but Quaker intercourse with them could never be permitted to extend to marriage. In other words, the eighteenth-century Quaker view of diversity was that, even at its best, it had to be held at arms' length.

In the 1680s, Penn publicized extensively the New World prospects of his colony among Germans in the Rhineland, and his efforts bore considerable fruit in terms of German immigration to Pennsylvania. Many, especially in the eighteenth century, came over as indentured servants. The Germans were religiously diverse. Many belonged to sectarian traditions such as the Schwenckfelders, Moravians, Mennonites, and Dunkers, while Henry Muhlenberg eventually organized others into the more churchly Lutheran tradition. The authors of the 1688 Germantown petition against slavery were Germans to whom Mennonites and Quakers both have claims.

Another substantial ethnic group in Pennsylvania was the Scotch-Irish. About 200,000 emigrated from Northern Ireland to Pennsylvania in the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century. Like the Germans, the Scotch-Irish were often poor, and they often settled along Pennsylvania's western frontier. The strongly Presbyterian Scotch-Irish were, however, more religiously uniform than were the Germans. Many Germans were supportive of Quaker pacifism, but that was not the case for the Scotch-Irish. Ethnic integration, or the "melting pot," was not terribly common in Pennsylvania during this century, as most ethnic groups lived in their own enclaves.

Quaker attitudes toward these new immigrants alternated between wary and welcoming. Sometimes Quakers complained about the looseness of morals exhibited by the new immigrants and the alleged increase in crime resulting therefrom. In 1732, for example, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting deplored "the Depravity of Manners so observable in our Streets; sorrowful enough is it to see the great Encrease of Prophaneness and Lewdness . . . much owing to the Importations of great Numbers of the vicious and scandalous Refuse of other Countries."<sup>8</sup>

Eventually, however, Quakers found the new immigrants to be politically useful. The Quaker party maintained political dominance long after the Quaker decline into a small minority, largely through the willingness of most German and Scotch-Irish voters in the 1730s and 1740s to support the Quaker Party ticket. Both the Germans and

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the Scotch-Irish were far more likely to support the Quaker Party than the opposing Proprietary Party because the Quaker Party stood for positions most likely to appeal to the recent immigrants, especially cheap land, cheap credit, and low taxes. Also noteworthy was the skill of Quaker Party members in seeking compromise and fashioning consensus, skills which some in that Party imported from their experience with Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. In the 1730s and 1740s, Quaker Party leaders were skillful in fashioning political unity among a diverse set of voters of European descent.<sup>9</sup>

The Quaker Party was not by any means synonymous with the Yearly Meeting; there were considerable numbers of non-Quakers and former Quakers who belonged to the Quaker Party, the most famous of whom was Benjamin Franklin, while a few Quakers supported the Proprietary Party. Defending the liberties that Penn granted to Pennsylvanians became an indispensable rhetorical device for most Quakers, but for Quaker politicians, these precious rights often had little demonstrable connection to Quaker testimonies. It would not be as “a suffering church,” but instead as “an embattled political party or oligarchy,” that most Quakers justified their political positions and resisted outside threats.<sup>10</sup>

The ideal of diversity implies not only tolerance, but also inclusion. Were the Native Americans who lived within the boundaries of King Charles’ grant to William Penn part of Pennsylvania’s diversity? Throughout American history, an unambiguously affirmative answer has been hard to give to that question. When in 1755, as part of a worldwide conflict, war erupted on the western frontier of English North America, Quakers faced blame, as many saw them to be unreasonably hewing to an unfashionable peace testimony. The war was, by any standard, a dire event. As many as 1,500 frontier Euro-Pennsylvanians and Euro-Virginians perished as a result of the warfare with the Indians and French over the next decade. Thousands more were wounded, taken captive, or forced to flee their homes; others had to provide refuge to these homeless persons.<sup>11</sup> Quakers often lived away from the frontier. Still, they sorrowfully noticed this suffering, sometimes ministering to direct eyewitnesses, and they described it vividly, for example, in a 1759 Epistle from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.<sup>12</sup>

To what extent does the liberty that undergirds diversity include the liberty not to form a militia or a standing army, not to bear weapons even in self-defense, and not to pay taxes for war? Does it

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allow for making friends with a people who have suddenly become one's enemy? Did Pennsylvania's liberty permit Quakers and others to make war on the Lenape Indians, and, if so, according to what rules? The diversity within Quakers on these fundamental questions was—and is—enormous, not to mention the diversity among all Pennsylvanians on these questions.

Amid dangers and sorrows, Quaker reformers such as John Churchman, John Woolman, and Anthony Benezet strongly advocated the centrality of Quaker testimonies, arguing during this war for a conception of liberty that included the exercise of conscientious scruples against paying war taxes. At the cost of sacrificing some public engagement that had been the hallmark of William Penn's life and example, they opted for a purity of witness that may have seemed to sacrifice societal unity in the short term, but had promise of re-establishing that unity on a sounder basis in the future: a basis that would be sounder both because it was more humane and because it was more in tune with ultimate divine intentions for this world. By way of contrast, many Quaker politicians ministered to Pennsylvania's diverse population by focusing their efforts inexorably in a more populist and secular direction, thereby protecting an opportunity for coalescing a broader societal unity out of the province's pluralism. They surely saw God as blessing this practice of the art of the possible.

In wartime, such a choice, however loftily expressed, had immediate, gut-wrenching effects. In April 1756 some Pennsylvania legislators urged the governor to declare a bounty on Lenape Indian scalps, both those of men and women. This very popular measure was endorsed by two Quaker legislators, John Mifflin and Joseph Fox. These two Quakers were disowned within a month's time, but the governor did in fact do as they asked.

Jack Marietta, in a 1984 publication, concluded, "The province had licensed a pogrom."<sup>13</sup> Two decades later, I wonder whether, rather than a pogrom or lynching, we might view the appropriate historical analogy to this event to be a vigorous measure against terrorism. As we grapple with the consideration of whether the embrace of diversity includes our enemies, we should likewise consider whether we regard Lenape Indians attacking frontier settlements of German or Scotch-Irish settlers as the functional equivalent of an *al-Qaeda* cell operating out of central Philadelphia. Surely there are concrete measures that even pacifists could advocate to safeguard our society against those who are dangerous. Quakers historically have been will-

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ing to allow police to apprehend those who have inflicted violence upon innocents and for the latter to be prosecuted in a criminal justice system.

One problem with governmental and popular conduct of this past war (i.e., the French and Indian War) and our present war has been the broad net that has been cast by the government, drawing in not only active perpetrators of violence, but also those who would better be categorized as sympathizers and sometimes as mere bystanders, and then treating all in similarly brutal and inhumane fashion. For those of us living in the aftermath of torture inflicted by the present administration at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, we have become all too familiar with the slippery slope of abridging someone else's human rights so that we can safeguard the rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of those we define as part of "our" community. In endorsing the populist bounty on Indian scalps, were Fox and Mifflin so different from American politicians of the past four years?

The coming of war also created tensions between the Quaker Party and their hitherto steadfast German and Scotch-Irish supporters. Favoring a robust military defense in the face of multiple Indian attacks on the frontier, most German and Scotch-Irish did not trust the pacifist-leaning Quaker Party, even with diminishing numbers of members of the Religious Society of Friends in its leadership. While this would translate into victories for Proprietary Party members in some Assembly contests, mostly it heightened Pennsylvanians' frustrations with the electoral process. Other than their perceived weakness on military defense, the Quaker Party still had attractive positions on most other issues. The Proprietary Party never had any realistic prospect of winning a majority of seats in the Assembly. Pennsylvania, with all of its diversity, was essentially a one-party state.

Quaker reformer Israel Pemberton was a chief mover in the 1756 establishment of the Friendly Association for Regaining and Preserving Peace with the Indians by Pacific Measures. (I know of no other Quaker organization with a more ungainly name.) Among the tasks undertaken by the Friendly Association in its short lifespan were publicizing Lenape Indian grievances against the proprietor, especially the notorious, allegedly fraudulent Walking Purchase of 1737. They called for an investigation of these grievances. It also sought concrete improvements in British-Indian relations, including the licensing of traders and fairer pricing for the furs sold by Indians.

Historians have presented a mixed judgment on the work of the Friendly Association. Hugh Barbour and Jerry Frost rendered a positive verdict, especially in regard to long-term effects: The Friendly Association “marks the beginning of a continuing official concern by the Society of Friends for the welfare of the Indians.” Moreover, in the willingness of Friends like Pemberton to establish voluntary associations outside the official Quaker meeting structures, “the Friendly Association shows a change in Quaker attitudes toward reform.”<sup>14</sup> But a skeptical Marietta noted that while “no other form of Quaker philanthropy except abolition followed so soon after the Quaker shift to sectarianism,” he understood the Friendly Association’s work as an example of the “perils of philanthropy.” Placing emphasis on the unsettling political effects of the Friendly Association’s work, he concluded that its successes “were few.”<sup>15</sup>

I find Marietta’s perspective most helpful here. The Friendly Association’s strategy, while it had some attraction for Pennsylvanians wishing a slashing political attack on the Proprietors’ policies, had no appeal to frontier folk who wished for their titles to be secure, even in the wake of the questionable Walking Purchase. Nor were those wishing a stronger Pennsylvanian military defense against Indian attacks pleased by what they saw as Quakers coddling the Indians. Overall, the short-term political effect seems to have been to further erode the Quakers’ political standing with the broader Pennsylvanian public.

To continue the post-9/11 analogy, a modern day equivalent would seem to be advocacy for the grievances of Arab and Muslim publics. Can one conquer jihadism simply through military and police activities, or does a proper response to organizations like *al Qaeda* involve a genuine engagement with broadly-held Muslim grievances? Organizations like the American Friends Service Committee and Christian Peacemaker Teams, of whom Quakers are a supporting force, have not hesitated to affirm the latter alternative, and present advocacy for such causes as justice for the Palestinians and an American military withdrawal from Iraq. Even today, this radical, prophetic form of diversity that promotes an inclusion of those who might sympathize strongly with one’s enemy does not meet with widespread agreement in our own political environment.

The French and Indian War was officially concluded in 1763, but to Pennsylvanians who lived on the frontier it hardly seemed that way. In the summer of 1763, Pontiac’s rebellion continued to arouse vio-

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lence that fell upon frontier folk. Pennsylvania had exhausted its funds and had no further way to bolster frontier defenses. In this terrible context, a group of fifty Scotch-Irish Presbyterian frontiersmen hailing from Paxton township in the western part of the colony sprang into action. In December 1763, they slaughtered in cold blood 20 Christian, noncombatant Indians, men, women, and children, in Conestoga and Lancaster. The perpetrators of these murders went unpunished; indeed, in western Pennsylvania (but not in Philadelphia), their actions had popular support. The perpetrators saw these Indians, Christianized as they were, as spies in their midst, giving valuable intelligence to the Indians engaged in warfare as part of Pontiac's rebellion. They had no credible evidence for such accusations. One might equally insist that these Indians were scapegoats, a convenient and easy target for revenge killings. Biblically-steeped settlers would also have seen holy war (we might well say "jihad") as an option, with one asserting that Indians should be "Destroyed as ye Jews destroyed ye Canninites, without regard to fd. or foe."<sup>16</sup> Certainly, in the fog of war, many ghastly and inhumane actions seem excusable.

In February 1764, the Paxton boys marched on Philadelphia, ostensibly to kill 140 peaceful Indians who were being sheltered there, as well as Quakers such as Israel Pemberton who had been instrumental in outreach to the Indians. Philadelphians at last felt themselves under threat and mobilized a defense as never before, while Pemberton slipped away to New Jersey and the Moravian Indians were sent to New York for their protection. The supporters of the Paxton boys noted that as many as 200 of the young men who rallied and trained with weapons to oppose them were Quakers. This was ironic, of course, because the Quakers had done so little to fight the hostile Indians on the frontier in the previous eight years. A delegation of Philadelphians, including Benjamin Franklin, met the Paxton men on the outskirts of the city and successfully persuaded them to return home in return for the submission of their manifesto to the Assembly. Of the demands presented to the Assembly, the only one that eventually became law was a restoration of the bounty on scalps.

The Paxton march stimulated a large literature—63 works by May 1764. What strikes me, reading excerpts from this literature, is how little had changed in the rhetoric concerning the relationship of Quakers and Indians over the previous 108 years, since the arrival of the first Quakers in North America in 1656. I have written previously about the anomalous nature of the relationships between Quakers,

Indians, and Puritans during the first two decades of Quakers' North American presence. Both Indians and Puritans were sometimes unsure where the Quakers' allegiances lay. Early Quakers contrasted persecuting Puritans unfavorably to hospitable Indians, but then sided unhesitatingly with the Puritans in the brutal King Philip's War.<sup>17</sup> William Penn surely would have seen that war as the kind of event to be avoided at all costs in his dealings with Lenape Indians.

Penn's 1682 treaty with the Indians made the odd-but-necessary assertion that there was no difference between the Quakers and the English. A pamphlet on behalf of the Paxtonites asserted the opposite: "In many things change but the Name, Quakers and Indians are the same."<sup>18</sup> An overblown accusation? Surely. But my reading of such documents as John Churchman's journal makes me want to wrestle with the Paxtonites' argument here, rather than dismiss it outright. Churchman seemed more sympathetic toward the Lenape Indians, with whom he desired Pennsylvanians to have friendly relations, than he did toward Germans on the frontiers who were suffering the loss of their kinfolk during Indian attacks. Quaker references to diverse population groups within Pennsylvania were usually politically correct. Thus a Quaker epistle incorporated in Churchman's account refers approvingly to both "the friendship with our Indian neighbors" and "relieving the distresses of our fellow subjects, who have suffered in the present calamities, for whom our hearts are deeply pained." Still, when relief of the distress of fellow subjects led to fervent advocacy of military measures, Churchman's sympathy for the Germans disappeared.<sup>19</sup> One should not make too much of these scattered references, as the Quakers of the mid-eighteenth century certainly thought of themselves as English. Still, we may ask how we should regard ambiguities relating to Quaker national allegiances (or perceptions thereof), especially during wartime.

Perhaps the enemy-including diversity of Quakerism necessitates an ambiguity in our answers to such questions. If the Light of Christ within brings us into contact with a Beloved Community, or Kingdom of God, that transcends human nationalities, then a confession that the nationality of Pennsylvanian Quakers had become a difficult thing to pigeonhole ought to be seen as a positive factor. To live in that place which problematizes national allegiances would cause Quakers to share much of the unpopularity that the Hebrew prophets had with their contemporaries. Paradoxically, this essay celebrates contributions to American concepts of diversity by a peculiar people

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who cannot be entirely certain of their Americanism in wartime, if Americanism is defined in any way as support of institutions dedicated to killing human beings.

The Paxton excerpts that I've read provide little evidence of introspection on questions relating to Quaker identity. Quakers were more concerned with criticizing the Paxtonites. This excerpt from correspondence written in opposition to the Paxton boys resonates with a theme that had repeatedly arisen during the previous century:

In Boston Government, where the Quakers were used in the most cruel Manner, that the Serpentine Nature in Man could invent, they bore cruel Whippings, cutting off their Ears, and several were murdered, and for no other reason, then for their faithful obedience to CHRIST: And this was all acted by . . . Envious, Malicious, Hard-Hearted Presbyterians. I don't remember ever reading, or hearing tell, than any one Quaker was ever put to Death, for his Religious Principles, but in Boston Government out of the Hands of Presbyterians.<sup>20</sup>

The Quaker tone had turned harsh indeed toward a group that had been a solid part of the Quaker Party's electoral coalition ten years earlier. Of course, Governor John Endicott of Boston was not a Presbyterian, as were the Paxton boys, but a Congregationalist. However, Presbyterians and Congregationalists have usually been close, so this passage maintains some force. This differed from the Quakerism of the early eighteenth century, seeking consensus and compromise not only within its own meetings but also within the broader society with its many different nationalities.

The political implications of the Paxton affair were fairly clear and not necessarily favorable toward Quakers. As one Friend wrote, the Paxton boys "have insulted the Government, committed diverse Riots & murdered the Indians under the protection of the Government & are still going on in acts inconsistent with all good Government; yet these are the People that want to govern us, but I hope we shall never come under their power. If we should, they would serve us perhaps in the same manner they did some of our Brethren in New England."<sup>21</sup>

It took another crisis, the American War of Independence, to make it happen. However, in a dozen years the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians did play a leading role in a Pennsylvania government without Quakers, under the auspices of the newly formed

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Constitutional Party. In 1776, this government would write a new constitution for the new state, retaining Penn's provisions for religious liberty and a guarantee of trial by jury, but little else from Penn's charters. The Bill of Rights to the American Constitution similarly in 1789 would include such freedoms, and while such freedoms would be understood to apply to English Quakers, German Lutherans and Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, their application to African Americans and American Indians were amorphous at best (and non-existent at worst) in their original context.

In the area of religious liberty, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's decision in 1816 permitting Richard Allen to set up a separate African Methodist Episcopal denomination played a crucial role, and Reconstruction-era amendments were more solid in proffering religious liberty to African Americans nationwide. American Indians, usually seen as members of dependent yet sovereign nations, languished in constitutional limbo in the area of religious freedoms for an even longer time. The most decisive action has come in the past three decades, with Congressional passage of the Native American Religious Freedom act in 1979, followed by legislation protecting Native American gravesites and permitting ceremonial peyote usage.

In terms of our relationship to biological descendants of those Natives whom European colonists widely regarded as terrorists from 1755 to 1764, there has been substantial healing and reconciliation. In terms of applying lessons from that decade to those who serve as the functional psychic equivalent of the Lenapes in our time, i.e., the worldwide Muslim community from which a small jihadist segment has emerged, I submit that we as Americans have a long way to go.

As compared to Penn's provisions for liberty of conscience and a right to trial by jury, his peace policy pursued through fair dealings with Indians, while highly romanticized through memory and story, has followed a more difficult legal path. In many ways, the evolution continues. Americans have not yet fully grappled with what I see as a core feature of the mid-eighteenth century Quaker witness: their struggle to bring even those people from whom the ranks of our enemies have been drawn within the circle of inclusion, consensus, compromise and love.

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