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A FILMMAKER'S REVIEW OF *THE LIGHT IN THEIR EYES*

LAUREN TANEL

An old raspy voice fills a quiet, muffled office at Haverford College. It is 1964 and the 80-year-old Professor Clarence Pickett hunches over a vinyl recorder and discusses the events of his lifetime. He discusses one of the most modern and meaningful moments of his life as he recalls his work in responding to the terrors of Nazi Germany.

This was, of course, a tragic experience for the Jew, but on the whole, I think, any of us that participated in that felt that it was a privilege to lay oneself alongside the Jew who suffered, recognizing that suffering, in itself, may bring to life new sources of strength as it often did in these Jewish exiles.¹

This audio clip is featured in the short film that I created for Professor Richard Evans' Quakers Studies course to demonstrate Haverford-affiliated Quakers' response to the Holocaust.

The full film can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/647511888>.

This article contains my reflections on the project. After searching through hours of digitized lectures, speeches, and memoirs, scouring through the archives of the Quaker & Special Collections at Haverford College, and turning pages of the diary of Clarence Pickett, I was left with materials that demonstrate how pacifist and unifying the Quakers are. However, this result is telling in itself: Quaker storytellers manipulated how they are viewed as a people and how they reacted to the Holocaust. The stories we are left with are not the full truth, but one that was engineered by the recorders to paint them in a positive light. I intend to use this film to demonstrate that this media archive is a representation of what those past Quaker storytellers wanted us to remember. These lasting histories must be taken with a grain of salt, because the legacy that remains is how American Friends of the WWII-era wished the

world to remember them and poses challenging reminders of the dangers of hagiography.

The film begins with an expression of Quaker values by Professor Henry Cadbury as he lectures in 1963 on the history of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). He shares that Quakers have always valued relief work as an effort of pacifism and retaliation against the “military way” of international service. While these morals ring true throughout Quaker history, pacifism has not always been as productive as we are taught to remember. In 1934, the *New York Times* reported on a speech delivered by Cadbury, chairman of the AFSC at the time, to the Central Conference of American Rabbis in which he urged them not to fight back against Nazi forces, but to instead, “cultivate good will.”² Cadbury insisted that, “By hating Hitler and trying to fight back, Jews are only increasing the severity of his policies against them.” Coming from the voice of a Christian white man, we can only begin to imagine the harm that telling a group of rabbis to resist protecting their families would cause. Additionally, in preserving Cadbury’s voice, we preserve his version of the story. Where are the voices of those men that he preached to and told not to fight back against their own genocide?

A similar example is Rufus Jones’ record of his journey to lighten the hearts of the German Gestapo. In the film we hear Jones praising his trip to an AFSC conference in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1942, just over three years after the event itself. Throughout the speech Jones laughs along with the crowd as he recalls, “the most interesting job we’ve ever undertaken.”³ In every recording of the conversation, Jones is ecstatic about his ability, along with Robert Yarnall and George Walton, to “soften hearts [of the Gestapo]... in the strength of God.” He says that “we had a wonderful meeting... with great depth of life and power” and that “the outcome was a miracle wrought by the way of love.”⁴ The message of victory was so well received by the Quaker community that the story became a household narrative. What fails to be recognized, however, is the lack of productivity that this meeting accomplished. According to the history passed down among Quakers, the “Three Wise Men” had gotten their word through

to the head of the Gestapo, Heinrich Müller. However, Müller was later central in initiating the Final Solution, a plan for the elimination of Jewish people.⁵ If they really had made an impact on those cold-hearted German police, would millions of Jews continue to be persecuted? The Quakers' act of goodwill was used as a tool of Nazi propaganda. And by glorifying this story as a joyful triumph, Friends historians minimize the devastating number of lives that were lost.

Of course, it is important to remember the value of work done by Friends worldwide to aid refugees during and after WWII. The issue that I aim to uncover, however, is the prevalence of romanticized accounts of Quaker efforts that I came across when searching through archives. The quantity of refugees assisted was of course significant, *but* it is necessary to include in Quaker memory the stories of those millions that did lose their lives in the Holocaust. Mass genocide was committed, and it is important not to idealize relief efforts to the point that they mask the harm that occurred.

It is possible that the cause of this idealism stems from a complex of Quaker superiority and Christian saviorism⁶ that Cadbury specifically projected when discussing his work in saving American Jews as well as by lauding the Friends' position on slavery. When lecturing on Quaker Social Concerns, Cadbury identifies the "wholesale objection to those institutions"⁷ although Quakers are known to have owned slaves and contributed to the chattel system.⁸ Cadbury also continues to claim that

as soon as the Negroes were freed... the Friends felt a great deal of concern for their welfare. They were as innocent and naïve as the American Indian and quite as likely to be exploited. They were completely without any ordinary education... They were likely to develop bad habits and therefore the Quakers had in mind various forms of working for the Negro welfare.⁹

This piece of audio is a shocking form of white saviorism, especially as it was being taught in 1963, so long after the trauma took place. We should continue to question why these beliefs alone are the ones that were chosen to be recorded and maintained in

Haverford's legacy. This ideology echoes in the words of Pickett that close my film. In 1964 he used the word "*privilege*" to describe his time working with suffering Jews and left his memory of the Holocaust as an experience that "revived in the human race a sense of its essential *oneness* which never will be lost." It was clear to me when I came across this recollection that influential Quaker figures perpetuate a romanticized interpretation of the events that unfolded on Jews of the world during WWII.

It is impossible to go back and change these memories. However, as the carriers of those memories, it is necessary that we deconstruct the ideal we have been left with and search for more representation from the missing pieces of the story. In my film, I deconstruct the privileged narratives that we are left with and change the way that multimedia records save uncommon and self-validating histories. The way that these influential men—Pickett, Jones, and Cadbury—preach pacifism comes off as ignorant instead of life-saving. Hopefully my film, and this supplementary analysis, will help Quaker historians realize that it is detrimental to view an entire community of people as heroes. We always must question how historical figures paint themselves and what is chosen to be remembered. Being a student at Haverford College, my observations reveal the way a Quaker institution portrays itself. The archives that were chosen to be chronicled paint the college very well, and still leave me wondering what pieces of the full story I am missing. Who were the Jewish students in Cadbury's lecture hall that lost their family members to genocide? Where are the voices of the rabbis that were told to be silent? This film shows me and others the media archive that represents what those past Quaker storytellers wanted us to remember, but it is not the full story.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Clarence E. Pickett, “Reminiscences,” *Haverford College History Recordings*. Institutional Scholarship, Haverford College Special Collections, 1964, <http://hdl.handle.net/10066/4368>. Self-recorded.
- 2 “Urges Good Will By Jews For Nazis,” *The New York Times* (Jun 15, 1934, ProQuest Historical Newspapers): 15.
- 3 Rufus M. Jones, “History of American Friends Service Committee,” *Haverford College History Recordings*. Institutional Scholarship, Haverford College Special Collections, Feb 9, 1942, <http://hdl.handle.net/10066/4582>. Self-recorded.
- 4 Rufus M. Jones, “Our Day in the German Gestapo,” *The American Friend* (Jul 10, 1947): 265-267.
- 5 “Heinrich Müller: The Highest-Ranking Nazi Who Got Away,” Sky History TV Channel, www.history.co.uk/articles/heinrich-muller-the-highest-ranking-nazi-who-got-away.
- 6 David H. Watt, “Rufus Jones, Racism, and Eugenics,” Independent College Programs H116: Ethical Struggles in Catastrophic Times – Quakers Responses to the Holocaust. Class lecture at Haverford College, Haverford, PA, April 27, 2021.
- 7 Henry J. Cadbury, “Social Concerns.” *Haverford College History Recordings*. Institutional Scholarship, Haverford College Special Collections, 1963, <http://hdl.handle.net/10066/4575>. Self-recorded.
- 8 Jules Rensch, et al. “A Quaker Call to Abolition and Creation.” *Friends Journal* (Apr. 2, 2021), www.friendsjournal.org/a-quaker-call-to-abolition-and-creation/.
- 9 Henry J. Cadbury, “Race Relations. Lecture 31.” *Haverford College History Recordings*. Institutional Scholarship, Haverford College Special Collections, 1963, <http://hdl.handle.net/10066/4567>. Self-recorded.