
Book Section:
Bennett, B. orcid.org/0000-0002-2751-5309 (2022) Transatlantic abolition and the unquiet library: Print culture and the making of a 'celebrated philanthropist'. In: American Philanthropy at Home and Abroad: New Directions in the History of Giving. Bloomsbury , pp. 67-85. ISBN 9781350151963

Transatlantic Abolition and the Unquiet Library: Print Culture and the Making of a 'Celebrated Philanthropist'

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Libraries have long been viewed as locations of peaceful – even silent – work, as well as critically important sites of sociability. While the physical site of the library is frequently a place of sanctuary and quiet repose, a repository for archives and books, it simultaneously nurtures radical exchanges and loud dissent. Productive noise can emerge in meetings, reading groups and especially in the written texts that are produced as a consequence of immersion in libraries and then are studied in, or borrowed from, them. Libraries are places for undertaking the kind of work which can lead to disturbance, restlessness, activity and noise outside of their bounded spaces. The library is, in other words, fundamentally *unquiet*, though library users can also choose to experience it as a restful retreat. Indeed, the British Library's current podcast series "Anything but Silent" acknowledges this, demonstrating the multiple ways in which libraries empower their users. Libraries have often provided crucial resources for individuals involved in social justice, inspiring them and bringing them together in person or through print. Likewise, public libraries in particular have had a long and well-established relationship to philanthropy via donations and fundraising activities. [1]

Philanthropy, broadly defined as the love of mankind, was chiefly understood in the nineteenth century as having a relationship to charities and to agents and agencies of reform.[2] It is not a term we might immediately associate with the abolition of slavery. Instead, we might think of its connections to corporate and individual giving. However, the word *philanthropy* was used in the nineteenth century to suggest an interest in the well-being of others, specifically those who were held in enslavement. Without a doubt, abolition was the most significant philanthropic concern of the nineteenth century. Philanthropy therefore

connects libraries to abolition and anti-slavery in important ways. Here I focus especially on the role of libraries and impact of print culture in the transatlantic abolitionist campaigns of the eighteen and nineteenth centuries. While print culture made a major contribution to the abolition of slavery in the United States, it is what I call the *unquiet library* which played a key role in making that possible.[3]

In what follows I consider the contributions made by two Quaker men to transatlantic abolition via their connections to print culture and libraries. One was Anthony Benezet the French-born Philadelphian educationalist. The other was a Leeds-born merchant named Wilson Armistead who so admired Benezet's example that he produced a mid-century edition of his memoirs to keep his memory alive. They were both committed library users who valued their library memberships. Benezet was both a member (and first Librarian) of the Library Company of Philadelphia (founded in 1731) one of the earliest and most important subscription libraries in the colonies. Evidently Wilson Armistead understood the relationship of to empowerment until the end of his life, publishing a pamphlet titled "Public Libraries for Liberia and Sierra Leone" (1865) three years before his death. He was a member of the Leeds Library (founded in 1768) the oldest surviving proprietary subscription library in Britain. Both the Library Company and Leeds Library were vitally important to the social and intellectual networks of the cities in which they were located.[4] They were key sources of information and printed matter for both men, and also gave them access to like-minded people. Though Armistead and Benezet had quiet demeanours they were fearless and noisy in their contributions to the print public sphere, intervening when they saw injustice at work. The libraries and their resources accelerated their very unquiet forms of activism, which were largely focused on anti-racist and abolitionist writing. Benezet framed his interventions on slavery and injustice in relation to sound; in a letter on the slave trade to the Quaker abolitionist Richard Shackleton dated 6 June 1772, he asked rhetorically, '"Can we be

both *silent* and *innocent* spectators?"'[5] They both used networks of printers, booksellers, libraries, purchasers and readers to disseminate their writings. They also relied upon friends and acquaintances to carry letters and printed texts across the Atlantic to petition for change; Benezet's assiduity in this regard was particularly well known. Benjamin Rush, his friend and fellow member of the Library Company of Philadelphia, wrote,

> If a person called upon him who was going [on] a journey, his first thoughts usually were, how would he make him an instrument in its favour; and he either gave him tracts to distribute, or sent him letters by him, or he gave him some commission on the subject, so that he was the means of employing several persons at the same time, in various parts of America, in advancing the work he had undertaken.[6]

Clearly, Benezet understood the possibilities offered by mobile individuals in an era before the establishment of a reliable postal system. This enabled him to build his activism very widely. David Crosby writes that,

> He was not content with speaking or publishing; he conducted a powerful lobbying campaign, creating networks of Quakers and other like-minded reformers to approach opinion makers, legislators, officials, churchmen, and any others in the colonies and in Europe who were in a position to influence policy. [7]

In all these respects then, it is appropriate to think of Anthony Benezet (as Wilson Armistead and others certainly did) as a philanthropist. Armistead was probably familiar with Benezet's reputation for piety and activism from an early age, through his membership of the Society of Friends. It is possible, though probably unverifiable, that Armistead accessed the English edition of Roberts Vaux's *Memoirs of Anthony Benezet* (1817) from the Leeds Library. Vaux was a well-known philanthropist himself, actively involved in penal reform, education and abolition and his book was the most significant source of information

on Benezet. The Leeds Library possessed a copy of an English edition, published in 1817 by W. Alexander, a York-based Quaker publisher. This extended the American edition in ways set out in an anonymous preface,

> In reprinting these interesting Memoirs, the Editor has incorporated with the text some very long notes, which he found in the original; and has also made many small corrections; but the general arrangement remains unaltered. The Editor has also added some extracts from a letter written by Anthony Benezet to John Pemberton, of which he possessed a manuscript copy.[8]

The Library cannot trace any definite date of receipt; the catalogue's first mention of the book is 1836. Since Armistead became a member of the Library in 1844, it would certainly have been possible for him to access it there. However, given its Quaker subject matter it might also have been part of his personal library, which contained other books about Friends. He donated at least two foundational Quaker works from his own collection to the Leeds Library; the journal of George Fox (1694) and Robert Barclay's *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (1678). This is part of a longstanding pattern of Quaker ownership (or authorship) of works on notable members of the Society of Friends. For instance, the Philadelphian-based Vaux published *Memoirs of the Lives of Benjamin Lay and Ralph Sandiford* (1815) two years before his book on Benezet. Both Sandiford and Lay were uncompromising British-born Quakers who moved to Philadelphia and agitated for abolition, often to the fury of slaveholding Quakers. Inspired by Vaux's work, Armistead would go on to produce an updated and revised edition of his own, *Memoirs of Anthony Benezet* (1859). He further developed the expanded English edition of 1817 writing,

> The scarcity of the original memoir of this good man, long out of print, has induced the compiler to issue the present volume, which is considerably enlarged, and

> somewhat improved in form, believing that the example of so humble, active, and practical a Christian, is more worthy of being known and imitated at the present day, when such labours as he was engaged in are as much needed as at any former period.[9]

The particular qualities he notes here -- 'humble, active and practical a Christian' -- were all ones he especially valued and indeed shared. They all have a powerful relation to the way philanthropy was understood. A key definition of philanthropy links it to *practical benevolence*, something Armistead also acknowledges in relation to the 'practical…Christian' Benezet. When he draws special attention to the idea of emulation he might easily be talking about how he personally responded to the other man's example. In addition, he explicitly draws attention to what he calls Benezet's 'enlightened and unbounded philanthropy' and to his personal benevolence, which he argues is 'usually combined in the characters of the most noted philanthropists.'[10] The British Quaker was inspired by the example of Benezet's contribution to the earlier phase of the campaign for the abolition of slavery, and wanted to revive his memory and work for a new generation of abolitionist activists.

Anthony Benezet's Funeral and the Unquiet Library

However Armistead first encountered Vaux's work it is clear from the two prefaces quoted above that Vaux's original text was adapted after it crossed the Atlantic. This process of adaptation can be further traced in an abiding anecdote about Benezet's funeral, an event which became famous for its simplicity and size. The anecdote was repeated, with slight variations, in multiple texts over the next few years, in this manner making its way to England. Eventually, as I will shortly outline, it made a textual return to Philadelphia and then travelled South, after abolition, into the Freedmen's Schools being set up in the post Emancipation South. Benezet's biography was used to suggest what the contours of an

exemplary life might be; he did not strive after wealth or self-aggrandisement but instead pursued disinterested duty, underpinned by his deep ethical convictions. His history offers a counter to the capitalist ethos which was increasingly determining how character was judged on both sides of the Atlantic. What starts as an anecdote with specific personal details was adapted over time as local references lost their specific and recognisable meaning. Eventually what remains is a vital message about Benezet's chosen role as abolitionist, educator and philanthropist. The subtle textual changes in multiple descriptions of the same event are revealing about the way editors altered texts to suit their particular audiences. They also provide a good example of the way that Benezet's posthumous reputation for philanthropy was sustained within the medium of print, including via libraries, as abolition moved even more substantially into its transatlantic phase after his death in 1784.

The description of his funeral first appeared at the end of a short piece published by Benjamin Rush who became an active abolitionist after the dead Benezet appeared to him in a dream. Rush later described this in a strange story titled "The Paradise of Negro Slaves -- A Dream" (1787), published in the *Columbian Magazine*. A few years later, in a description of Benezet's funeral, he noted,

> Colonel J__n, who had served in the American army, during the late war, in returning from the funeral, pronounced an eulogium upon him. It consisted only of the following words: "I would rather," said he, "be Anthony Benezet, in that coffin, than George Washington with all his fame."[11]

As one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, Rush was well-placed to reflect upon the disjunction between Washington's 'fame' and magnificent funeral and Benezet's very different send-off. While about 4,000 people attended Washington's funeral, which went ahead with considerable pomp and formality, Benezet's was attended by about

400 Blacks and a smaller number of Whites, showing the mutual respect and understanding between Benezet and the community whose rights he upheld and sought to foster. The anecdote subsequently appeared in Lindley Murray's *The Power of Religion on the Mind* (1787). Murray a fellow Quaker, had been born in Pennsylvania in 1745 and pursued a successful career as a lawyer before retiring to York in 1794. The following year he published his hugely influential *Grammar of the English Language*, using the significant earnings it brought him to fund philanthropic projects, including abolition work, penal reform and the care of those with mental illnesses. He would undoubtedly have consulted Benezet's own works (perhaps in a library) -- *An Essay on Grammar* (1778), and *The Pennsylvania Spelling Book* (1778).

Meanwhile the anecdote about Benezet made its way into Vaux's 1817 *Memoir*, then languishing for a few years before reappearing in the work of the American engraver and historian John Barber. He first used it in his *An Account of the Most Important and Interesting Religious Events* (1834) before re-using it in a book he edited with Elizabeth Barber, *Historical, Poetical and Pictorial American Scenes* (1851). This illustrated book was comprised of accessible short pieces, aimed at a Christian audience. Barber and Barber write,

> An American officer of the Revolutionary army, in returning from the funeral, pronounced a striking eulogium upon him. "I would rather," said he, "be Anthony Benezet, in that coffin, than the great Washington with all his honours."[12]

The words are largely the same as they were in Rush's original. However, the officer is now anonymised and the army has been revised from 'the American army, during the late war,' to an 'American officer of the Revolutionary army'. Armistead's later version of the anecdote is very similar, suggesting that as well as knowing Vaux's work he may have been familiar with the Barbers' book. He writes,

> An officer, who had served in the American army during the revolutionary war, in returning from the funeral, pronounced a striking eulogium upon him. It contained but a few words: "I would rather," said he, "be Anthony Benezet, in that coffin, than the great Washington with all his fame!"[13]

Here the 'Revolutionary army' becomes 'the American army during the revolutionary war', giving the anecdote additional context, and implying its connection to an earlier point in history. He changes 'honours' to 'fame', perhaps imagining that this would be more recognisable to a British audience with less immediate knowledge of, or personal relationship to, George Washington. Perhaps he was also being sensitive to an audience which was on the losing side of the war! He retains the addition of the adjective 'striking' to emphasise the significance of the unnamed officer's comments.

A key reason these writers could access the works through which the anecdote travelled, and from which they made their revisions, was that they all had access to a range of different libraries, of various types and scales. The word *library* can refer to personal library as it does in Walter Benjamin's essay "Unpacking my Library", which describes the process of organising his books after a period of storage. As he unpacks, his interest in the contents of his collection is reignited. He sees his books as containers of ideas but also as material objects with rich individual histories and characteristics. But he is particularly interested in an intimate and highly personal relation to the materiality of books, their haptic and tactile qualities. He depicts the passion of the collector for her or his books – their covers, pages, markings as well as contents.[14] Private collections can indicate social class and education, or can be ostentatious symbols of wealth – of conspicuous display. One of the best fictional examples of this is Jay Gatsby's showy library in *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Described as 'a high Gothic library, panelled with carved English oak, and probably transported complete

from some ruin overseas', it is full of books with uncut pages.[15] This signifies their purely decorative use -- the books have never been read. Though Benjamin argues that personal libraries do not have to be made exclusively of works the collector has read (indeed he argues that this is emphatically not the case) Gatsby's uncut pages reveal that he has never intended to read them. James Gatz reinvents himself as Jay Gatsby through his shows of wealth, yet his carefully curated life is always on the cusp of falling apart. The owl-eyed man who the narrator encounters in the library during one of Gatsby's parties intimates this while returning a volume to the shelves, noting that 'if one brick was removed the whole library was liable to collapse.'[16] Gatsby's library emphasises the way he uses his possessions to hide his previous identity for the sake of social cachet, and his love for Daisy Buchanan. It is part of his elaborate theatrical performance, with books as props, rather like the vast collection of shirts he displays when he eventually invites her into his house.

Libraries are (and have always been) locations of sociability and activity in which relationships with real and virtual others are cultivated and sustained. They can be physical locations of sociability providing sanctuary for those who may face persecution elsewhere. These may include the melancholy and introverted, as Herman Melville playfully suggested in the opening pages of *Moby Dick* (1850) in which the (now deceased) fictional Sub-Sub Librarian is credited as being the source of the list of extracts about whales which opens the novel. Yet though the Sub-Sub has searched through multiple volumes, he has not produced the last word, or what Melville calls 'veritable gospel cetology'. There is always more to be found, as *Moby Dick* reveals in its digressive pages, and some (though certainly not all) of this is to be found in libraries. David Reynold writes that Melville celebrated the value of serendipity in collecting sources,

> Melville himself was a lynx-eyed reader, quick to discover literary possibilities in randomly acquired minor literature. Many of his works are heavily indebted to his variegated reading which seems to have been done in the spirit of a character in *White-Jacket* who says that "public libraries have an imposing air, and doubtless contain invaluable volumes, yet, somehow, the books that prove most agreeable, grateful, and companionable, are those we pick up by chance here and there; ...those which pretend to little, but abound in much."[17]

More commonly than the idea of a personal collection, the word library refers to something more widely accessible – a communal or public collection of printed matter. In this meaning scale is less important than function and impact. Recently the best-selling novel, *The Librarian of Auschwitz* recounts the story of Dita Kraus's role in caring for a tiny and precious collection of eight books hidden in Block 31 of the camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. These are used as educational tools for the young Jewish children of the camp and remind the prisoners who encounter them of a world beyond its fences and gates. The library's limited contents were supplemented by the knowledge and memories of prisoners who Kraus called living libraries.[18] The combination of the tiny collection of printed texts and embodied knowledge forms a singularly unquiet library which must be protected at all costs. At the same time since it is clandestine it is also quiet, and knowledge of its existence is dangerous to its users.

It is the idea of size that the novelist Hilary Mantel recollects when she describes her small (and disappointingly dull) school library as a 'suitcase library'.[19] While it was particularly limited, no library (except perhaps Jorge Luis Borges' imaginary library in his 1941 story "The Library of Babel") can contain all that has been written, for as Alberto Manguel writes, libraries are not 'exclusionary'. He notes,

> we know that every orderly choice, every catalogues realm of the imagination, sets up a tyrannical hierarchy of exclusion. Every library is exclusionary, since its selection, however vast, leaves outside its walls endless shelves of writing that, for reasons of taste, knowledge, space and time, have not been included. Every library conjures up its own dark ghost; every ordering sets up, in its wake, a shadow library of absences.[20]

It is possible that Mantel's early experience of the limitations of the library allowed her to identify with Toni Morrison's famous provocation that we must write the books we want to read, if they haven't yet been written. Walter Benjamin made a similar point when he argued that 'Of all the ways of acquiring books, writing them oneself is regarded as the most praiseworthy method.'[21] Celebrated library users who decided to write the books they wanted to read (in this sense) include the exiled Karl Marx, whose quiet hours working in the Reading Room of the British Library produced *Das Kapital* (1867).

Libraries are invaluable resources, especially for those not wealthy enough to buy books. Active and engaged citizenship is frequently produced and nourished by libraries and their holdings. Publicly funded libraries are a testament to the recognition that this is a public good. Ali Smith's recent collection *Public Library and Other Stories* (2015) champions public libraries by presenting a collage of reflections on public libraries by other people, especially writers, and short stories about books. In her book *Why Women Read Fiction* Helen Taylor draws attention to the comments of Borges (who was also the Librarian of the National Library of Argentina from 1955-1973) who argued, she writes, 'that he always imagined Paradise as a kind of library' adding,

> he is not alone. Described by the Library Campaign as "the bedrock of a nation's entire culture strategy", my correspondents dubbed it "a magical community space"

> and "sacred pleasure palaces" which "opened a world beyond where I was and allowed me to wonder about lives different from mine".[22]

Access to the books in libraries and to the buildings in which they are housed allows readers to imagine the possibility of other kinds of geographies, systems and worlds to those within which they themselves live out their daily lives. Repressive regimes often regard this as profoundly dangerous, and try to exert discipline and control. To this end, there is a long tradition of banning, censoring or burning books, while the libraries and the buildings that contain them have frequently been destroyed by invading armies or repressive regimes. This reminds us of the ways that libraries are symbols of intellectual liberty and good community, which often makes them threatening to those in power. Attacks on libraries remind us that history often repeats itself. Indeed, libraries are often key sites of contestation within culture wars and actual wars. Wai Chee Dimock opens her influential book *Through Other Continents* by a description of the destruction of the Iraqi National Library and the Islamic library of the Religious Ministry on 14 April 2003. She uses this to reflect on the 'ontology of time', showing how the Iraqi population and US forces differently interpreted this event.[23] While the US forces understood their task through the present, she argues that Iraqis were reminded of the moment in 1258 when the Mongol army had destroyed the same library. For them, the attack had its roots deep in a historical past whose records were held within the library itself, as well as within public memory.

The subversive possibilities of libraries come from a combination of their holdings with the opportunities they give (as physical locations) for the like-minded to unite, to think, to plan and to remember. In the acknowledgements to her classic work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan made a point of stating the importance of the New York Public Library,

> Without that superb institution, the Frederick Lewis Allen Room of the New York Public Library and its provision to a writer of a quiet work space and continuous access to research sources, this particular mother of three might never have started a book, much less finished it.[24]

Years earlier, the novelist and activist Lydia Maria Child relied on the holdings of libraries to research and write her work, recognising that her gender significantly restricted her access to print culture. As a child she had encountered the books in her brother's personal library – in the absence of a library of her own – and later in her life she was able to avail herself of his growing personal library (numbered somewhere between seven and eight thousand works at his death in 1863). George Ticknor, who was closely involved with the Boston Athenaeum, was a key figure behind the foundation of the Boston Public Library leaving it a collection of his Spanish and Portuguese books in his will, extended Child free library privileges at the Boston Athenaeum. This was something only ever offered to one other woman. But when she published the *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans called Africans* (1833) which advocated for the immediate emancipation of the enslaved without compensation to slaveholders, he was outraged. Her uncompromising writing discomforted and disturbed some, while delighting others. Her work was without doubt unquiet, and the Athenaeum withdrew her access to its resources, presumably to silence her. Maria Weston Chapman rapidly led a campaign among her abolitionist supporters to purchase her a membership. But the Athenaeum once more refused to allow her access. Though deeply frustrated, she thanked her supporters for their backing, exclaiming '"I have never in my whole life, met with anything that gratifies me more, or affected me so deeply"'.[25] A woman who had grown up with access to books always at one remove, appreciated their subversive power.

Even when they are excluded from libraries or from normal life, readers have historically tried to find ways to access the books that give them hope in times of anguish, understanding that reading and the knowledge it brings can provide solace as well as suggest possibilities of resistance and revolution. Manguel argues that,

> every library, including those under strictest surveillance, contains secretly rebellious texts that escape the librarian's eye. As a prisoner in a Russian camp…Joseph Brodsky read W.H. Auden's poems, and they strengthened his resolve to defy his jailers and survive for the sake of a glimpsed-at freedom. Haroldo Conti, tortured in the cells of the Argentinian military of the 1970s, found solace in the novels of Dickens, which his jailer had allowed him to keep. For the writer Varlam Chamalov, sent by Stalin to work in the gold mines of Kolyma because of his "counter-revolutionary activities," the prison library was itself a gold mine that "for incomprehensible reasons had escaped the innumerable inspections and 'purges' systematically inflicted on all of Russia's libraries."[26]

Yet even when no library can be accessed, the contents of books can be recollected and reconstituted for new purposes as they were by the living libraries Kraus discusses. The writer Hisham Matar describes the way his father Jaballa, whose 'literary memory was like a floating library', recited aloud 'the elegiac Bedouin poetry of the alam' in his solitary prison cell in the notorious Abu Salim jail in Libya rather than the modern and Modernist poems he also knew by heart.[27] Remembering this older tradition of poetry that 'privileges the past over the present' enabled him to reflect upon a history that went back to a period well before the birth of the Gadaffi regime which imprisoned him. The longevity of that tradition, and the contents of the works themselves, gave the prisoners hope. Jaballa Matar's recitations, listened to in silence by other prisoners in their own cells, spoke of other times, as well as

better places than the cells in which they were imprisoned. This provided solace and countered authoritarian violence, suggesting the possibility that times could change and improve.

Of course, there are also libraries that are more obviously and overtly unquiet, too. A prime example is the People's Library of Occupy Wall Street, founded in September 2011 and physically removed by the New York Department of Sanitation when they cleared Zuccotti Park. The volunteer librarian William Scott noted, in a manner recalling both Walter Benjamin and Abraham Lincoln,

> I love books—reading them, writing in them, arranging them, holding them, even smelling them. I also love having access to books for free. I love libraries and everything they represent. To see an entire collection of donated books, including many titles I would have liked to read, thoughtlessly ransacked and destroyed by the forces of law and order was one of the most disturbing experiences of my life…With public libraries around the country fighting to survive in the face of budget cuts, layoffs and closings, the People's Library has served as a model of what a public library can be: operated for the people and by the people.[28]

While the police dismantled the library, the poet and fellow librarian Stephen Boyer recited poetry at the top of his voice. Scott writes that some of the police listened to (and were moved by) the words and the performance of resistance they witnessed. This reminds us that if poets are, as Shelley argues in "The Defence of Poetry" (1821) – the 'unacknowledged legislators of the world', their words have the capacity to make lasting meanings and to disrupt the acts of the otherwise powerful. The recitations of Boyer and Jaballa Matar both disturbed the quiet, but also created moments of quiet and reflective listening. In short then, libraries are both places of certain kinds of quiet but more importantly they are unquiet

locations that foster noisy activity and challenge well beyond themselves. As Bella Bathurst has written, 'The libraries' most powerful asset is the conversation they provide – between books and readers, between children and parents, between individuals and the collective world. Take them away and those voices turn inwards or vanish. Turns out that libraries have nothing at all to do with silence.'[29]

Anthony Benezet: 'Celebrated Philanthropist'

So far this essay has shown the significance of libraries throughout history; how they are perceived by users and by those who feel threatened by them; and how they provide tools for radical personal transformation. All of these understandings of how the library is *unquiet* relate to the way that the contents of a library can produce radical and positive change. However, there are more uncomfortable elements of libraries that also need to be acknowledged. Libraries have often been exclusionary both in terms of who can become a member, such as Lydia Maria Child. In addition, since curatorial practises are never neutral this impacts upon whose voices are contained and preserved within their collections as Borges suggests in his resonant term 'a shadow library of absences'. In a period in which scholars and activists are increasingly probing the histories of public and private institutions such as universities, libraries are not, and should not be, exempt from scrutiny. The histories of libraries often reveal their connections to unethical practices and individuals. By examining the historical conditions within which libraries were founded and financed we can find many examples of libraries being used for purposes of self-aggrandisement. The case of the nineteenth-century steel magnate and library philanthropist Andrew Carnegie is instructive here. He is probably the single most significant library philanthropist in history, though the Bill and Melinda Gates' Foundation's Global Libraries initiative is another vast

philanthropic project, which has supported public libraries for about two decades. Having made his fortune, Carnegie resolved to give away his money, believing firmly that philanthropy should help those who help themselves. This doctrine corresponded with a belief in the importance of self-education and self-reliance and he believed that free library provision could be at the heart of this kind of personal transformation. He donated more than $41 million dollars for the erection of 1,679 libraries in 1,412 US towns between 1886 and 1917. In addition, he funded libraries in Belgium, France, Ireland, Serbia and the United Kingdom. Yet, his devotion to libraries was second to his commitment to making money, and his transition from extreme poverty to colossal wealth was in part a result of his notoriously poor treatment of those who worked for him.[30] While many welcomed his philanthropic largesse, others refused to participate in such a system of giving and receiving, feeling disquieted by the disjunction between the public good libraries purport to perform, and their often disavowed or unacknowledged origins in exploitative workplace practices and the pockets of unethical tycoons.

Despite these necessary caveats, it is important to note that the two libraries especially used by Armistead and Benezet helped to create a critically understudied transatlantic connectedness that continued despite a dominant wider political culture which sometimes encouraged national separation, and hostility. As we have seen, they were key to underwriting the philanthropic activities of abolitionists. Exploring the histories and legacies of sites such as libraries, reminds us of their valuable and unquiet contribution to freedom of thought, and expression. However, we should remember that subscription libraries were not open to all, and that it was not until the development of a public library system that fuller possibilities of freely accessible libraries emerged. Though libraries have been important throughout history for dissidents and for radical and reforming movements, they have also been implicated in White supremacy and murky and exploitative business practices. More

particularly for what is being discussed here, scholars have been exploring the foundational relationship between slavery and early American libraries for some time with disturbing consequences. Recently, Sean Moore has provocatively claimed that, libraries 'stood at the nexus of two major branches of transatlantic commerce: the book trade and the slave trade.'[31] This was certainly true of the Library Company of Philadelphia. Located in a key centre of book production and circulation it was a vital and progressive intellectual and social resource for many. Yet it was founded by a group of individuals who included both abolitionists and slaveholders. This means that the library's history, like those of many august institutions was indebted to the system of slavery. Benjamin Franklin himself, its key founder, was a slaveholder and dealer until the late 1750s, though Benezet was instrumental in turning him into an abolitionist.

Benezet's work and personal example underpinned the abolitionist activity of the eighteenth century and helped pave the way for nineteenth-century abolition. Yet despite his importance, his reputation faded in the early nineteenth century before a series of closely related publications revived it once more. The circulation of a number of texts that were accessible in the holdings of libraries amplified his connection to philanthropic projects. One of them included the only known image of him and named him explicitly as a 'celebrated philanthropist'. He was extremely resistant to sitting for his portrait, arguing that he was too ugly for any visual representation to be preserved.[32] In consequence, since no illustrations, drawings or paintings were produced within his lifetime the only image (Fig. 4.1) is an imaginative fantasy produced decades after his death. It provides insight into how he was perceived. Though its accuracy should not be relied upon, its iconography and symbolic message is instructive. It first appeared in *Historical, Poetical and Pictorial American Scenes*. It depicts a pedagogical moment. Benezet sits on a stiff-looking wooden chair at the very centre of the portrait. On his left is a table on which a closed volume, an inkwell and

two quill pens are either ready to be used – or perhaps have just been put down. In his lap there is an open book, its words visible though not actually legible. Two young Black children, a girl and a boy, stand by his knees. The writing implements may be theirs – one is slightly smaller than the other, as if reflecting the respective sizes of the children. Equally, they might have been used by Benezet to pen one of his abolitionist and educational works. While the boy points at the book, presumably parsing it for himself after an earlier lesson, the girl looks directly and intently at the adult man who returns her gaze thoughtfully, as if fully engaged. Benezet's right hand is elevated, the index finger pointing upwards. Quite possibly he is engaging in religious instruction and has moved from the words on the page to some kind of exegesis. Certainly, the image represents figures in harmony not only with each other but also with the reading and writing objects around them. The link between each element of the scene is made visible by the physical connectedness of the three bodies and their relationship to the written work. The shoulder of the girl touches that of the boy, while his finger points at both the page and simultaneously to Benezet's left hand which is holding a book which might be part of his personal library. This connects the boy with the man, refusing the divides of race and age, while it also provides a conduit between the man and girl.

[insert Fig. 4.1 here]

The books, pens, and implied discussion are central to the image's message of cross-racial and intergenerational sociability and to the process and importance of acquiring and disseminating knowledge. The two children are becoming literate; in consequence of this newly-acquired skill their lives will be transformed. Alongside a personal change, literacy will produce a far broader political revolution, allowing them to advocate for themselves in the print public sphere. The pens and books provide the physical tools the children will be

able to use to undertake imaginative journeys of self-representation, leading to self-reliance. The particular link between the three is their access to print culture: the books bring them together. Overall, the iconography recalls the fact that Benezet was highly regarded as a teacher, especially by the African-American community. His reputation as an educator lived on and was revived in the work of Armistead and others.

His teaching career had commenced in 1739 when he started to work in the Germantown Academy, in Pennsylvania. Following a period working at the Friends' English Public School in Philadelphia, he founded a school for girls in 1755. By this time, he had also been teaching African Americans for five years, in evening classes he led when his routine work was over. Increasingly, he recognised that he had found his vocation. He went on to establish the first day school for African Americans in Philadelphia in 1770. His success in this area is evident; many of his students would go onto become notable abolitionists, including Absalom Jones, Richard Allen and James Forten. The image celebrates his role as a teacher, and also highlights a broader idea. His personal desire to teach came from a more deeply-rooted appreciation of the way in which literacy and accessible books would be central to eventually overturning slavery and building a more equal civil society. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the image is accompanied by a caption explicitly naming Benezet as a 'celebrated philanthropist'.[33] This undoubtedly alludes in part to his personal virtue and reputation for benevolence. His longstanding work with African Americans, as well as with Acadian refugees to Philadelphia from Canada in 1756, was well-known. His many written anti-slavery works included his treatise *An Epistle of Caution and Advice Concerning the Buying and Keeping of Slaves* (1754). His influential essay *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes* (1766-67) marshalled considerable evidence to make a strong argument for abolition, while his S*ome Historical Account of Guinea* (1771) would be profoundly

important to Olaudah Equiano.[34] He founded the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage which would become, after his death, the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. The image of Benezet as a 'celebrated philanthropist' thus brings together the key elements with which this essay is particularly engaged: transatlantic abolition understood as a form of philanthropy, and its relation to the creation and circulation of transatlantic print culture, underpinned by libraries and the connectedness they enable.

The publication of the *Historical, Poetical and Pictorial American Scenes* took place during a critical juncture in transatlantic abolitionist labour. In September of that year the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, enabling fugitives to be returned to enslavement even if they were in free states. Clearly, at a moment in which abolitionists were especially addressing the treatment of fugitives as well as the educational opportunities for free Blacks, the model of Benezet was powerfully enabling. He believed that equal access to education would challenge White supremacy and lead to a demonstration of the equality of Blacks and Whites. Such evidence would in turn be one element of an incontestable argument against slavery and discrimination on the grounds of race. Thus, teaching was the first part of a process leading to ethical, political and social transformation. The image is probably intended to suggest his idiosyncratic pedagogic methodology, one which relied on a model of kindness and personal humility rather than authoritarianism. This is not something usually associated with the unquietness I have been focusing on, though through its profound connection with the power of literacy as an individual and political tool, it does have the idea of production of disturbing the status quo at its heart. Despite the progressive message about racial equality he personally espoused, the image itself hints at a hierarchical depiction of White Christian patriarchal benevolence, centred on access to books. The paternalistic top-down message of

the illustration is at odds with the model of self-help premised on education, literacy and equal access to power that Benezet's educational efforts promoted.

Armistead's book would be the basis for another work on Benezet, published by a Germantown-based philanthropic organisation, the Benezet Auxiliary Freedmen's Relief Association. Germantown (where Benezet had first started his work as an educator) is well-known for its contribution to antislavery and abolition. The Germantown Quaker Petition Against Slavery (1688) was the first organised protest against slavery in the colonies. The Association intended the example of Benezet's life and teaching to be made available to a new generation through the medium of a new memoir. The anonymous preface notes that the book is intended as inspiring gift to teachers in the South, working in Freedmen's schools:

> The following narrative, chiefly drawn from a small volume, entitled, "Anthony Benezet, from the Original Memoir, Revised, with Additions, by Wilson Armistead," was read at a late meeting of the Benezet Auxiliary Freedmen's Relief Association, and is printed by the Association, in the hope that a short sketch of one of the pioneers in the anti-slavery cause might be acceptable to the teachers engaged in the Freedmen's schools in the South, as a token of sympathy for them, in their labour of love, from some of their friends in the North.[35]

So, while Armistead had hoped that Benezet's life and work would be an example to inspire abolitionists, the Association in turn wanted teachers and the newly emancipated to be similarly inspired. It is tantalising to think this 'token of sympathy…in their labour of love' being carried into the Freedmen's schools in the South to disseminate Benezet's message of equality, and activism. This language suggests connections to definitions of philanthropy which ally it to the love of mankind, while intimating a more radical agenda of self-help

which moves it away from White paternalism into Black activism. W.E.B. Du Bois, a great admirer of Benezet's work with Black children, praised the contribution made by schoolteachers in the South in the period of Reconstruction. He noted that, 'Behind the mists of ruin and rapine waved the calico dresses of the women who dared, and after the hoarse mouthings of the field guns rang the rhythm of the alphabet.'[36] Acquiring literacy and having access to books and education gave the possibility of personal and national transformation. He argues:

> The greatest success of the Freedmen's Bureau lay in the planting of the free school among Negroes, and the idea of a free elementary education among all the classes in the South…The opposition to Negro education in the South was at first bitter, and showed itself in ashes, insult, and blood; for the South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro. And the South was not wholly wrong; for education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent. Nevertheless, men strive to know.[37]

Du Bois' sense of the relationship between knowledge and 'danger…dissatisfaction and discontent' – a condition of righteous unquiet political unrest -- is at the heart of the exhilarating possibilities offered by literacy and by books and libraries. Indeed, the verb form of the word unquiet is defined as meaning 'to disturb the quiet of; to disquiet'. It is this very condition of powerful self-awareness and intellectual desire which literacy, books and libraries foster.

Learning to read was a powerful form of resistance for formerly enslaved individuals and the wider Black community. [38] The relationship between literacy, agency and the desire for citizenship was well-recognised by activists. Harriet Jacobs and her brother John S. Jacobs together ran the Anti-Slavery Reading Rooms above the offices of Frederick

Douglass's *North Star* newspaper in Rochester, from 1849-50. Jacobs' own first person account of her enslavement repeatedly showed just how powerful a tool her literacy had been to produce her own emancipation and subsequently represent her experience. Yet in texts authored by White writers, White characters were often depicted as teaching Blacks in a manner which elevated the teacher and demeaned the taught. Take this well-known example from Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose family were well-known as social reformers and educators. Early in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851-2) the thirteen-year-old Master George is depicted in the eponymous cabin, teaching the adult Tom to read. Tom and his wife Chloe regard George's skill with a kind of respect that reinforces hierarchical racial positioning. Tom looks at George 'with a respectful, admiring air' while Chloe says '"How easy white folks al'us does things!"'[39] This representation implies that it is a lack of skill rather than opportunity and systemic racism which excludes the enslaved from literacy. Tom eventually learns to read, but it is a slow process. The process of acquiring literacy is a key trope in many of the slave narratives and abolitionist texts that proliferated in the 1840s and 1850s. Refusing the enslaved access to literacy was a way of maintaining White supremacy. While Stowe depicts Tom's literacy as a route towards teaching the enslaved to embrace Christian lives in which earthly sacrifice leads to eternal salvation, more radically, Frederick Douglass made his own acquisition of literacy central to a radical understadning of self-emancipation and uplift. In chapter seven of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) he describes the way he developed stratagems in order to learn to read and write once he realised that his enslaver was fearful of what an educated enslaved person might become. He shows the way his understanding of the empowering possibilities of reading and writing grew throughout his childhood, in the process making a wider argument for other African Americans. In particular, he depicts literacy as a tool allowing the enslaved access to forms of self-representation. His well-known encounter with Caleb Bingham's educational

volume *The Columbian Orator* gave him access to arguments for emancipation made by an enslaved individual himself, enabling him to marshal arguments against enslavement in a fuller way than he has previously done, but also filling him with disquiet and despair at his own position.

Conclusion

Wilson Armistead evidently believed that reviving attention to Anthony Benezet's activism, beliefs and personal example was timely and important. His memoir helped to revive the American's posthumous reputation for a mid-century audience in a period of intensive abolitionist activity. He reminded his readers of Benezet's critical contribution to the earlier phase of abolition, which led to the 1807 Slave Trade Act. This renewed focus on Benezet in the mid-century period was part of a wider strategy to stimulate interest in the multiple ways in which abolitionists could be activists. His personal activism was a testament to the continuing importance of Benezet's example. He founded the Leeds Anti-Slavery Society in 1853, and his wife Mary Armistead was its Librarian. He also produced a series of books that reminded readers of key figures from the past including James Logan the celebrated Quaker bibliophile. Logan chose the first forty-three volumes for the Library Company of Philadelphia and on his death bequeathed his own extensive personal library (now the Loganian Library) to the Library Company. Armistead also wrote about the achievements of people of African heritage such as Paul Cuffee, a devout Quaker, abolitionist and a merchant. It seems extremely probable that Armistead's influential work *A Tribute for the Negro* (1848) took inspiration in part from Benezet's earlier writing. Because he understood the importance of libraries, Armistead passed his library membership to his sons when he died. In this way, the Leeds Library served as a means through which his memory (as an activist and father) survived. He gave his sons access to the physical site of the library

while it in turn provided them with the possibility of accessing the voices and history it held, if they should so choose. This is an example of the kind of practical teaching Benezet would have appreciated for he had earlier stipulated in his own will that his estate should go to his wife, and then (after her death) be directed towards the education of African Americans. He left his personal library to the Society of Friends Library in Philadelphia.[40] It is highly fitting that using the resources of the many different kinds of unquiet libraries in which we continue to conduct our work enables us to keep the memories of Armistead and Benezet alive, and preserve the records of their philanthropic labours.

Action and benevolent giving underwrote the philanthropic work of abolition. The strategies of abolitionists were varied included the use of print culture to create a transformed political and social climate. Many abolitionists used their relationships to faith communities to build opposition to slavery beyond their immediate circles. Their membership of such groups gave them religious and moral authority. Yet it also provided access to transnational networks of like-minded people. Religious nonconformists, especially in Pennsylvania and Yorkshire (both places with significant Quaker populations) created alliances based both on progressive religious and political commitments to dissent and commercial connections. Much of this is well-documented, however there is still a good deal to be discovered about both the way that engaged citizenship and habits of independent thought were fostered, and neglected figures who are starting to have new attention paid to them. In this context, a growing number of works are bringing new attention to Benezet's life and work.[41]

The extent to which discussions about antislavery and abolition shaped the eighteen and nineteenth centuries cannot be understated. Abolition brought together campaigners on both sides of the Atlantic, sometimes using existing networks established via trade and by religious affiliations, especially to the Society of Friends. Benezet was one of the most

important figures to first recognise how such transatlantic connectedness could be mobilised politically, to further the cause of abolition. His intellectual labour made him into a highly effective and influential abolitionist. The impact of his writing created a climate of intense activism, mobilising others to work for the cause, noisily and actively. His writing was vitally connected both to his longstanding interactions with the Black community and immersion in the holdings of the Library Company of Philadelphia. Library collections make it possible to trace the textual history of his abolitionist beliefs. Yet it is important to imagine the ways in which his face-to-face conversations with this community profoundly shaped his intellectual and ethical landscape. This is harder to trace because of gaps in the archive. A combination of conviction and personal regular engagement with African Americans, not just solitary immersion in print cultural productions, reinforced Benezet's abolitionism. Print culture was an important source for him, but his arguments were fortified and given life by these vital personal interactions. His Black interlocutors were living libraries with invaluable experiences. Their knowledge and their acts of resistance were as foundational to him as the books he read. He drew direct attention to this in one of the last pieces he published, the 1783 "Short Observations on Slavery".[42] Benezet understood that the kinds of works he was able to undertake had a crucial connection to the experiences and knowledge of non-Whites. As Manisha Sinha has recently argued, the 'actions of slave rebels and runaways, Black writers and community leaders, did not lie outside of but shaped abolition and its goals.'[43] While many stories of human interaction and movement can be traced through the holdings of the unquiet libraries in which scholars undertake research, other stories still remain outside of their boundaries. In order to remedy and correct our understandings of the past we must continue to acknowledge and address this. Furthermore, libraries themselves also need further investigation if we are better to understand their role in redressing the democratic deficit experienced by nonconformists and dissenters such as Armistead and Benezet and,

even more particularly, by the enslaved individuals whose rights were abrogated by the system of slavery.

[1] Kathryn Dilworth, "Philanthropy in Public Libraries: its Impact on Community Well-Being Missions", *International Journal of Community Well-Being*, August 2021, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1007/S42413-021-00140-8

[2] Robert H. Bremner, *American Philanthropy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1960); *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1996).

[3] The idea of the unquiet library is one I initially started to develop in "Guerrilla Inscription: Transatlantic Abolition and the 1851 Census," *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 17, No. 3 (2020), 375-398.

[4] Sean Moore writes that 'almost all Philadelphia reading eventually led back to the Company, establishing it not only as the central space of reading in the city, but also as a powerful social network of the literate and, usually, wealthy population.' Sean D. Moore, *Slavery and the Making of Early American Libraries: British Literature, Political Thought, and the Transatlantic Book Trade, 1731-1814* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 174.

[5] Wilson Armistead, *Anthony Benezet: from the Original Memoir: Revised, with Additions* (London: A.W. Bennett and Philadelphia: Lippincott and Co., 1859), 26.

[6] Quoted in Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), xiii.

[7] David L. Crosby, *The Complete Antislavery Writings of Anthony Benezet, 1754-1783* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 2.

[8] Roberts Vaux, *Memoirs of the Life of Anthony Benezet* (York: W. Alexander, 1817), 1.

[9] Armistead, *Anthony Benezet,* vi.

[10] Armistead, *Anthony Benezet,* 16, 76.

[11] Benjamin Rush, "Biographical Anecdotes of Anthony Benezet" [15 July 1788] in *Essays, Literary Moral and Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Thomas and William Bradford, 1806): 302-304, 304.

[12] John W. Barber and Elizabeth G. Barber, *Historical, Poetical and Pictorial American Scenes; Principally Moral and Religious; Being a Selection of Interesting Incidents in American History: to which is added a Historical Sketch, of each of the United States* (New Haven: J.H. Bradley and Cincinnati: Johnson and Brother, 1851), 56.

[13]Armistead, *Anthony Benezet,* 138.

[14] Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking my Library", in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Iluminations* trans. H. Zohn (New York: Shocken Books, 1969): 59-67.

[15] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 38.

[16] Ibid. The owl-eyed man says '"This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too – didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?"'

[17] David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

[18] Antonio Iturbe, *The Librarian of Auschwitz*, trans. L Zekulin Thwaites (London: Ebury Press, 2019), 25.

[19] Helen Taylor, *Why Women Read Fiction: The Stories of Our Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 66.

[20] Alberto Manguel, *The Library at Night* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 107.

[21] Benjamin, "Unpacking my Library".

[22] Taylor, *Why Women Read Fiction,* 63.

[23] Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 2.

[24] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* with an introduction by Lionel Shriver (London, New York, Toronto, Dublin, Camberwell, New Delhi, Rosedale, Johannesburg: Penguin Classics, 2010), 3.

[25] Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman of the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 221.

[26] Manguel, *Library at Night,* 114-115.

[27] Hisham Matar, *The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land in Between* (London: Penguin Books, 2016), 58-59.
[28] Karen Mc Veigh, (2011), "Destruction of Occupy Wall Street 'People's Library' Draws ire." *The Guardian*. 23 November 2011. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2011/nov/23/occupy-wall-street-peoples-library
(accessed 30 October 2021).
[29] Bella Bathurst (2011), "Secret Life of Libraries." *The Guardian*. 30 April 2011. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/may/01/the-secret-life-of-libraries/
(accessed 30 October 2021).
[30] Manguel, *Library at Night,* 96-104; Abigail Ayres Van Slyck *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890*-1920 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
[31] Sean D. Moore, *Slavery and the Making of Early American Libraries: British Literature, Political Thought, and the Transatlantic Book Trade, 1731-1814* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1.
[32] Jackson, *Let This Voice be Heard,* 20.
[33] Barber and Barber, *Historical, Poetical and Pictorial American Scenes*, 56. The Barbers were father and daughter.
[34] Crosby, *Antislavery Writings of Anthony Benezet;* Moore, *Slavery and the making of Early American Libraries,* 166-200.
[35] Anonymous, *Life of Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia: Sherman and Co., 1867), 3.
[36] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. B. Hayes Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23. See also *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899).
[37] Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk,* 27.
[38] Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering he Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).
[39] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. E Ammons (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994), 18.
[40] Henry J. Cadbury, "Anthony Benezet's Library", *Bulletin of Friends Historical Association* 23, No. 2 (Autumn 1934), 63-75.
[41] Irv A. Brendlinger, *To be Silent Would be Criminal: The Antislavery Influence and Writings of Anthony Benezet* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press. 2006); Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard;* Crosby, *Antislavery Writings of Anthony Benezet;* Marie-Jeanne Rossignol and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, eds., *The Atlantic World of Anthony Benezet (1713-1784): From French Reformation to North American Quaker Antislavery Activism* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).
[42] Crosby, *Antislavery Writings of Anthony Benezet,* 233, 243.
[43] Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 2.