



The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist

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The little-known story of an eighteenth-century Quaker dwarf who fiercely attacked slavery and imagined a new, more humane way of life

The Fearless Benjamin Lay chronicles the transatlantic life and times of a singular and astonishing man--a Quaker dwarf who became one of the first ever to demand the total, unconditional emancipation of all enslaved Africans around the world. He performed public guerrilla theater to shame slave masters, insisting that human bondage violated the fundamental principles of Christianity. He wrote a fiery, controversial book against bondage that Benjamin Franklin published in 1738. He lived in a cave, made his own clothes, refused to consume anything produced by slave labor, championed animal rights, and embraced vegetarianism. He acted on his ideals to create a new, practical, revolutionary way of life.

The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist Details

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From Reader Review The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist for online ebook

Corvus says

I became aware of The Fearless Benjamin Lay when I caught wind of an event with the author in my city. The event highlighted Benjamin as a Quaker, Dwarf, and abolitionist, so my interest was already piqued. When I sought out a description of the book and found that Lay was also an animal liberation proponent, it intrigued me even further. Benjamin Lay is someone that reactionaries would consider a dangerous, uber-radical, mega-snowflake by today's standards. It is truly remarkable that he held so strongly to so many radical convictions centuries ago- especially in a climate where he had few to no allies.

I want to note something before I get to deep into this review. I enjoyed this book and my review is mostly positive. But, the author makes a mistake that many white people make when writing about slavery. He centers whiteness. I do not mean that it is bad to talk about white people- obviously it is not in a biography about a white person. What I mean is that he makes statements- including in the title- that Lay was "the first revolutionary abolitionist." Two words are missing from that sentence: "documented" and "white." It may leave the sentence seeming not as exciting or sexy, but the way it is currently constructed plays into white histories of slavery that completely erase how enslaved and free Africans and Black people in general resisted slavery from the very beginning, but their efforts were violently oppressed and not documented. White abolitionists were absolutely critical to the struggle, no doubt. But, they were never the first.

I considered knocking off two stars for this, but Rediker's "Conclusion" and "Author's Note" sections won me back over to 4 stars. He is not ignorant of these issues. He simply didn't express them well. The conclusion and author's note are the best part of this book. I assume Rediker kept them separate so that he could be objective in his biographical account of Lay's life. I would have preferred more of the analysis in the conclusion placed throughout the rest of the book to help offset what may come off to some as a lack of understanding of the bigger picture.

Rediker undoubtedly did extensive research for this book, digging into histories that I am sure were not easy to access. One of the more surprising things for me about the book was how much Quakers were into slavery at one point. In many radical and anarchist circles, we learn that we got consensus-based and some other kinds of egalitarian organizing methods from Quakers. The fact that so many of them went out of their way to not only defend slavery, but to silence all opposition to it, was new knowledge for me.

Benjamin Lay was little person with kyphosis of the spine and as a result, already dealt with disability based discrimination. This and his working class status absolutely informed much of his behavior and values, which Rediker aptly points out, exemplify a more accurate picture of abolitionism than what some historians portray. Abolitionists tended more to be people of lesser means rather than rich academics that are often highlighted today. Rediker also notes Lay's disability, class, and passion being part of the reason he is not remembered as an important abolitionist or American hero. Our country idolizes racist slavers like Thomas Jefferson and forgets abolitionist, animal rights promoting, disabled, poor, law breaking, Quakers like Benjamin Lay.

Lay was a deeply religious man and this definitely informed much of his thinking, but not in the usual way we are used to hearing about it doing so. Benjamin not only opposed enslaving people, but also opposed men

holding high religious positions who used those positions to accumulate power and wealth. He opposed the exploitation of nonhuman animals, choosing to walk everywhere rather than travel by horse and choosing to eat a mostly vegan diet where he grew most of his food. The only animal products he consumed were honey from the bees in his apiary and some animal dairy. Benjamin wore modest clothing and refused to partake in products that were produced through slave labor such as sugar. Lay did all of these things- that many people in the developed world with internet access and a credit card find difficult to do today (self included)- in the 17-1800s.

I will not give away everything told in the book that Benjamin Lay does in his long struggle against pro-slavery Quakers and other slavery proponents. But, I will mention my favorite story, that is nestled in the end of the book as it is a good example of his determination and creativity in his mostly nonviolent activism. Lay attempts to speak to a white couple about their enslavement of a young Black girl. He tries to explain to them how slavery rips families apart and destroys lives. They refuse to listen. Lay eventually sees their child alone and invites the child to his dwelling. He spends time entertaining the happy child for the entirety of the day until finally the parents come running to him, crying that their child is missing. He listens to their story and then tells them that he has had their child all along and now perhaps they understand a tiny fraction of what their enslaved girl's parents must feel at the loss of their daughter.

Benjamin's antics are relentless, unapologetic, and unwavering in the face of extreme resistance, excommunication, loss of community, and ridicule on top of what he already dealt with as a dwarf. His ideas influenced generations after him- including the children of men who would stop at nothing to stop him. Two sons of one such enemy of Lay's both grew up to be abolitionists and ethical vegetarians through inspiration from Lay. The Quakers eventually came around and acknowledged the horrors of slavery- yet they still held through respectability politics that Lay deserved what he got. Lay was the passionate, relentless voice that made many others seem reasonable. He paid the price and really never got credit or redemption he deserved. He made space for white folks that came after him to criticize slavery in real and serious ways- not just the welfarist terms they used previously (treating slaves "well" but supporting slavery.) As Rediker states, we cannot know due to lack of documentation how far Lay went in his hands-on liberation activities with enslaved Africans. Yet, this book offers part of a much larger picture and Rediker definitely does Benjamin Lay's life and work justice.

Debbie says

This was a case of the author including every scrap of information he found on the person. The overview at the beginning turned out to be the most interesting part, in my opinion. I was expecting a book about what Benjamin Lay did in the fight against slavery, but most of that information was adequately summarized in the overview.

The book also talked about how many chimneys his parent's house had (and what this indicated about how much money they had), notes that he made in the margins of the books he read, and every single time he got in trouble with the Quakers. Much of the book was about how he was an arrogant, self-righteous man who would denounce preachers and do publicity stunts to make his points. He ticked off the Quakers to the point that he was kicked out by them pretty much wherever he moved.

He finally put some of that energy into fighting slavery at a time when only a few others had started to speak out against it. He did some publicity stunts. He wrote a long, train-of-thought book that required the author to summarize and interpret so we could get some idea of what he said. Lay seems like a hard fellow to like, but

he did help shift the Quakers toward standing against slave trading and later against slave owning. Lay also stood for treating animals with the same rights as humans. He's an interesting fellow, but I guess I found it a little repetitive to hear about every instance recorded of him denouncing yet another Quaker preacher.

I received an ARC of this book from the publisher through Amazon Vine.

Tonstant Weader says

Marcus Rediker has written an important correction to the history of abolitionism with his biography *The Fearless Benjamin Lay*. Lay was born in 1682, a commoner who worked as a shepherd, a glove-maker, a sailor, and a merchant and lived in Essex, Barbados, and Pennsylvania. He was a Quaker, perhaps more authentically devout than the many Quakers with whom he shared fellowship.

Lay was a child of the Glorious Revolution, influenced by the democratic idealism that animated that victory for the rights of Englishmen. It was a time of religious radicalism and while many of the sects faded away, the Quakers emerged as one of the strongest nonconformist faiths in England...and of course, there was Pennsylvania, their refuge. The Quakers were important in the abolitionist movement, but during the lifetime of Benjamin Lay, they not only approved slavery, but the most powerful and influential Quakers in America were slaveholders. Lay, after witnessing the heinous treatment of slaves in Barbados was a confirmed abolitionist and fought with all his might to change the church.

In denouncing greed, avarice, inequality, and slavery, Lay was never temperate. In fact, he was an avowed activist who employed direct action guerrilla theater. One time he stood in the snow without shoes and socks on one foot. When people expressed concern, he asked them why they were not concerned for the slaves who had even less clothing than he. He was all activism, not organizing, constantly ostracized from his community. It pained him, but not as much as silence in the face of injustice would have pained him. In the 1730s, then he was told to be quiet, to keep the peace, he said a phrase that is dear and familiar to all who seek justice, "No justice, no peace."

It is interesting to learn about Lay since his influence has been minimized and ignored in most histories of abolition. This reflects past and current biases for the educated, privileged reformer over the working class agitator. Lay is not the first nor will he be the last activist to disappear from history for not conforming to the ideal gentleman reformer. Look at the erasure of Bayard Rustin from civil rights history until society became more accepting of gay rights.

Rediker correctly identifies class prejudice as one reason that Lay's contribution was unmentioned. I think there is another, though, that is perhaps more potent. Rediker explained how Lay came to his opposition to slavery, through his belief in the Golden Rule, the brotherhood of man, and opposition to violence. Lay's abolitionism was about the equality of all, it was not rooted in pity for a lesser race. Many abolitionists opposed slavery with racial bias and animus, eager to ship slaves back to Africa and indifferent to their fate after manumission. They did not believe Blacks were equal, just that slavery was pernicious. Lay had none of that condescension. He was a radical believer in the equality of all. That is even more radical than his class politics.

It would be interesting to see how Benjamin Lay would do in Portland. He was an antinomian

environmentalist like many of the local anarchists of Black Bloc and Antifa. A vegetarian, who boycotted products that exploited and oppressed slaves, an environmentalist who imagined living sustainably in peace with the earth and the animals, a supporter of human rights, opposed to the death penalty and, of course, slavery. He was feminist before the word existed. He thought capitalism was violence and was anti-capitalist. He opposed all authority. He was 300 years before his time.

The Fearless Benjamin Lay is an interesting book of a fascinating man. It suffers from some repetition and some over-explication. For example, the author reprints two chapters of Revelations with Lay's interpretation, though the interpretation alone would have been adequate. His short biography of jobs and places is repeated often. It is also easy to get lost in the amazingly petty bureaucratic persecution of Benjamin Lay by one of the Quaker churches back in England, but that kind of pettiness does express how deeply his righteous anger offended those in the church.

To be honest, that pettiness struck me as familiar. My great-great grandfather was a Quaker abolitionist who violated their peace testimony by joining the Union Army. He was disowned by his church and to make their point complete, there is a line drawn through his marriage and birth record. They really went to that much effort to make their point. That's why when I was reading the extraordinary lengths the church in England went to in order to inflict unhappiness on Lay and his wife, I was not surprised.

The Fearless Benjamin Lay will be released September 5th. I received an advance e-galley from the publisher through Edelweiss.

<https://tonstantweaderreviews.wordpress...>

Stan Prager says

Imagine this: a hunchbacked dwarf living in early Enlightenment-era England, variously a farmhand, shepherd and glovemaking, but also a devoted autodidact gifted with great intelligence who despite his station in life becomes not only literate but highly-educated. Passionate and outspoken, he often dominates local meetings of the Society of Friends, flirting with antinomianism and distinguishing himself as a Quaker radical, often an outcast, publicly rebuking authority and earning the antipathy of the established order. He then becomes a sailor and, later settling as a merchant in Barbados, is so appalled by the human chattel slavery he encounters there that he adopts a fierce life-long antislavery stance that admits no toleration for anything short of abolition. Next, he makes his way to Philadelphia, where his troublesome nature again emerges, underscored by his unrelenting brand of antislavery agitation that alienates fellow Quakers, many of whom are slaveowners, most famously when he punctuates an annual Friends meeting by delivering a bellicose jeremiad against slavery and then plunging a sword into a Bible packed with a bladder of red pokeberry juice—a simulation of blood—that splatters those in attendance nearby! He writes a number of pamphlets denouncing slavery, as well as a rambling but impassioned book that is published by no less a figure than Benjamin Franklin. Ever self-righteous, obnoxious, curmudgeonly, he is also a wealthy eccentric who eschews materialism, and is well-known to his community as a philanthropist, a strict vegetarian, and a man utterly intolerant of slavery. He marries, but after his wife's death becomes even more zealous in his adherence to his radical faith, in his pursuit of justice, and in his crusade for abolition, as well as in campaigns against animal cruelty, capital punishment, the prison system, and the hypocrisy of the affluent elite. He closes out his life devoted to absolute self-sustenance, keeping goats, nurturing fruit trees, and growing flax that he spins into his own clothing, making his home in solitude in a cave with his collection of over two hundred books.

Okay, you have imagined it: could you suspend disbelief long enough to read a novel or watch a film based on a fellow like that? Well, this is no flight of fictional fancy but the actual tale of a truly extraordinary figure named Benjamin Lay (1682-1759) who somehow has managed to be remembered as little more than a footnote to history—on the rare occasions when he has been remembered at all. Historian Marcus Rediker—author of *The Slave Ship* and *The Amistad Rebellion*—seeks to resurrect this remarkable character from oblivion with his latest book, *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist*.

In this effort, Rediker largely succeeds, and in the process brings the talent of a skilled historian to bear as he sketches out the ground that the adult Lay walked upon in the early-to-mid-eighteenth century, a milieu largely unfamiliar to many readers, with fascinating glimpses of England, Barbados and colonial Pennsylvania in a transformative era that rarely receives appropriate scrutiny. Because so much of Lay's identity was wrapped up in his religious fervor, the author treats us to a study of the evolution of Quakerism—including its peculiarities and its many internal revolts—on both sides of the Atlantic. Absent this background, Lay's outrageous behavior—and it was indeed often outrageous—would seem to defy the boundaries of sanity. In fact, Lay was just the most recent actor to emerge in a tradition of antinominalist dissent—albeit an extreme incarnation—who with his carefully choreographed public protests not only danced at the edges of decorum but stomped upon any vestiges of it. That he cloaked his polemics in theatrics brought wide attention to his message, while provoking loud rebuke from those he routinely offended. Outwardly flamboyant, even crude, Lay's frequently offensive performance art was a thin disguise upon the true heart of a reformer deeply offended by cruelty, injustice, hypocrisy and the widespread betrayal of what he believed Quaker Christianity should be all about.

Lay's strict vegetarianism, as well as his opposition to animal cruelty, the prison system, and capital punishment—all of this distinguished him as a truly unusual individual for his time, further underscored by the fact that what had to have been the handicap of dwarfism in that era seems to have placed no brake on his behavior as he publicly campaigned for justice: hardly more than four feet tall, he ever played an outsize role in his community. But it was, of course, with his uncompromising antislavery agitation and demands for abolition that Lay left his mark on history. A century after his death, while the antislavery movement had gained wider traction, true abolitionists were still in a very tiny minority in the United States. In Lay's own time, his voice must have been a very lonely echo indeed. At the close of the eighteenth century, near the end of his long life, Benjamin Franklin and fellow Quakers took a public stand against slavery, but—as Rediker makes pains to point out—Franklin's own position on slavery was often manifested in ambivalence. That certainly could not be said of Lay, who never wavered in his insistence that chattel slavery was a great evil that represented a sin against man and God. Benjamin Franklin has been much-celebrated, but it was not he who penned one of the very earliest antislavery tracts in colonial America, but rather his friend Benjamin Lay, although the young Franklin can be credited for publishing Lay's opus, *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates* in 1737.

If there is a flaw in *The Fearless Benjamin Lay* it is that while extremely well-written it is clearly directed at a scholarly audience, with all of the strengths and weaknesses that implies. Lay lived such a colorful life that with virtually no embellishment his story should read like a James Michener novel. Alas, the typical limitations for academic writing in structure and prose means that the narrative frequently succumbs to dull passages even as it never falls short in fleshing out the man that Benjamin Lay was and adroitly recreating the age he inhabited. On the flip side, there are copious notes and little doubt that Rediker's finished work is firmly rooted in both best practices and the appropriate historiography. In the final analysis, I recommend this book for restoring from anonymity an intriguing figure who is especially deserving of recognition for taking a radical stand against slavery long before more than a handful of others would join in. And since the versatile Rediker also works in film, I would like to advocate that he next produce a documentary for general release that will bring the fascinating life and times of Benjamin Lay to a much wider audience.

[Note: A digital edition of Lay's book *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates* can

be accessed online at no charge at <https://antislavery.eserver.org/relig...>]

Review of: The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist, by Marcus Rediker <https://regarp.com/2018/09/09/review-...>

Ireene says

Absolutely fascinating biography of a bold, tender hearted and just man. Inspiration to all social justice activist today. If he could, we can.

Shomeret says

To honor July 4th I am reviewing a biography of a true American original whose life expands our knowledge of the history of American abolitionism, Quakerism and alternative lifestyles. Benjamin Lay was a very independent man who should be celebrated while we celebrate American independence. "Let your lives speak" is an old Quaker motto. Lay certainly did that with his own life. I received an ARC of The Fearless Benjamin Lay by Marcus Rediker from the publisher via Edelweiss in return for this review.

The first Quaker to propose immediate abolition of slavery was Benjamin Lay, and he made this radical proposal in colonial Pennsylvania in 1738. Lay was also a vegetarian and an animal rights advocate. He pioneered the boycott strategy by boycotting all products produced by slaves. He not only grew his own food, but made his own clothing woven from plant products and walked everywhere because he was opposed to the exploitation of horses. He treated his wife, Sarah, as an equal. So he had a very modern sensibility, and could be considered very much ahead of his time.

I feel that I owe a debt to Rediker for introducing me to Benjamin Lay whose radicalism and lifestyle can be appreciated by 21st century progressives.

For my complete review see <http://shomeretmasked.blogspot.com/20...>

Nancy says

He spent his later life living in a cave, a vegetarian and animal rights activist who made his own clothing. Yet his estate at his death in 1759 was valued at \$117,000 (in today's dollars).

He was an early convert to abolition, causing disturbances that his Quaker meeting house to remove him from membership.

He was a dwarf who married another Little Person, Sarah, a well-liked Quaker preacher, while he himself was reviled for his extremism.

The Fearless Benjamin Lay by Marcus Rediker resurrects the forgotten man who dared to stand up to wealth and power with the message that all creatures are God's children, and that to own a slave is to be steeped in sin.

Lay went to extremes to get his message across. Lay had been pressuring a neighbor Quaker in Abington, PA over their owning a slave girl. One day Lay encountered the couple's son and invited him to his cave. When the distraught couple found their son with Lay, he chastised them saying, "You may now conceive of the sorrows you inflict upon the parents of the negroe [sic] girl you hold in slavery, for she was torn from them by avarice."

Without a formal education, Lay wrote a book that was printed by Benjamin Franklin. It was Deborah Franklin who commissioned a portrait of Lay, a gift for her husband. It resides in the National Portrait Museum.

Lay's book printed by Benjamin Franklin

This vivid portrait of a unique personality is interesting as history, but Lay's vision transcends the years, for his concerns remain with us to this day and are more relevant than ever. As society struggles with issues of wealth trumping morality, consumerism and its impact on the environment and human health, and the continual fight against hate groups that devalue certain human lives, Lay's life stands as an example of how to live according to one's values and one's faith.

I received a free book from the publisher through LibraryThing.

Cybercrone says

"Benjamin's prophecy speaks to our times. He predicted that for Quakers, and for America, slave-keeping would be a long destructive burden."

"Benjamin Lay was, in sum, a class-conscious, gender-conscious, race-conscious, environmentally conscious vegetarian ultra-radical. Most readers of this book would think this combination of beliefs possible only since the 1960s, two full centuries after Lay's remarkable life ended."

Really fascinating bio of a truly outstanding personality. He used street theatre, writing, speaking in Meeting, teaching by example and embarrassing his 'betters' to get his concerns out to the population at large. I really enjoyed reading about his life and exploits.

However, the author doesn't seem to understand that midgets and dwarves are medically separate diagnoses whose owners look nothing alike, and whether or not they are politically correct, they must be used properly for the readers' proper comprehension.

Also the author seems to be lukewarm to the suggestion that Lay's "zeal and fury" were what allowed the

Friendly Persuasion to work later. There has always had to be the loud, hard push that overcomes the initial inertia. It has always been so. The job of the first wave of change is to get your attention.

Anyway, basically just loved the book.

Carol says

William Lay was a most unusual person in history, a self educated man who became an avid reader, only four foot seven inches with a hunchback, a man revolted by the bad treatment of slaves by their owners in Barbados, a vegetarian and animal rights proponent. I was curious about him because of his Quaker background and that Benjamin Franklin was one of his friends. It is an understatement to say that he was a free thinker.

Marcus Rediker produced a very well researched biography of William Lay and must have spent many hours locating illustrations for this fascinating book. It is written in a scholarly manner but the character and quirkiness of Benjamin Lay makes this book a standout. It is easy to know why slavery became such a passionate issue in his life by reading about his life in Barbados and Philadelphia. He had radical ideas of how to get his anti slavery position understood. You will not forget this person in history!

I received this Advanced Reading Copy by making a selection from Amazon Vine books but that in no way influenced my thoughts or feelings in this review. I also posted this review only on sites meant for reading not for selling.

Robin Tierney says

Just some notes:

The Fearless Benjamin Lay, renowned historian Marcus Rediker chronicles the transatlantic life and times of a singular man—a Quaker dwarf who demanded the total, unconditional emancipation of all enslaved Africans around the world. Mocked and scorned by his contemporaries, Lay was unflinching in his opposition to slavery, often performing colorful guerrilla theater to shame slave masters, insisting that human bondage violated the fundamental principles of Christianity. He drew on his ideals to create a revolutionary way of life, one that embodied the proclamation “no justice, no peace.”

Lay was born in 1682 in Essex, England. His philosophies, employments, and places of residence—spanning England, Barbados, Philadelphia, and the open seas—were markedly diverse over the course of his life. He worked as a shepherd, glove maker, sailor, and bookseller. His worldview was an astonishing combination of Quakerism, vegetarianism, animal rights, opposition to the death penalty, and abolitionism.

While in Abington, Philadelphia, Lay lived in a cave-like dwelling surrounded by a library of two hundred books, and it was in this unconventional abode where he penned a fiery and controversial book against

bondage, which Benjamin Franklin published in 1738. Always in motion and ever confrontational, Lay maintained throughout his life a steadfast opposition to slavery and a fierce determination to make his fellow Quakers denounce it, which they finally began to do toward the end of his life.

Commoner, quaker, philosopher, sailor, abolitionist

Guerilla warfare theater

Read a lot, philosophy, greeks, Antihenes, Diogenes - Cynics, the purpose of life is to live in virtue, in agreement with nature. Ascetic, share resources, austere life.

2.5 million transported by the time he wrote his All Slave keepers book

Antinomian: against oppressing others.

Idiom thee and thou

Grew food, not participate in money economy.

Philadelphia, wife Sarah.

Thomas Tryon, English writer, book "The Way to Health, Long Life and Happiness, or, A Discourse of Temperance and the Particular Nature of All Things Requisite for the Life of Man" 1683... on Happiness late 17th c: war has roots in cruelty to animals.

Observed even then that cattle and other animals being industrially produced and turned into commodities.

Believed they have natural rights. "Fellow Creature", Lay used too. Fellow Citizens of the World.

Bloodless revolution to bring about a slaughter-free society. Pythagoras for geometry theorem and vegetarianism and opposition to the killing of animals.

"Hope that the Earth might become a Paradise again, to all People, as it is to some."

Sharon Huether says

Benjamin Lay: A Quaker Dwarf who became the first Revolutionary Abolitionist. He was born in Essex England in 1682 and traveled to Barbados and Philadelphia . He used metaphors of sheep and lambs to admonish Quakers and others to free their slaves.

He often disrupted church meetings to make his point in his beliefs. He even did theatrics to get the attention of a crowd.

By trade he was a Glover and a book seller. He also traveled the seas in earlier days.

Benjamin married Sarah, she was also a dwarf and a Quaker. She often spoke in meetings and was against slavery.

After Sarah died Benjamin grew all his own food and became a total vegetarian.

He and Benjamin Franklin were good friends. Mr. Franklin also printed pamphlets on Antislavery for Benjamin Lay.

I won this Free book from Goodreads First-Reads.

This was such an interesting book. I never knew there were Abolitionists in the 1700's

Holly says

Benjamin Lay was a fascinating individual who's life work was to end slavery.
Not quick and easy reading.

Spicy T AKA Mr. Tea says

I've read several books by Marcus Rediker over the years. And I swear, each one just gets better. This was an amazing read. I'd never heard of Benjamin Lay but Rediker's description of him coming to a Quaker meeting then simultaneously damning those Quakers who enslaved and traded in Africans while slamming his sword down in the middle of his Bible appearing to spray Christ's blood all over those gathered was fucking amazing! A brilliant piece of street theatre! (He had hallowed out his bible and put a sac with berry juice in it!) Lay was an anti-racist activist motivated by his experiences and faith that called on him to not only condemn the institution of slavery, but act on that moral position. He did this decades before the abolitionist movement really took shape.

Annnnyyyway, Lay was completely disowned and excommunicated by the Quakers. In his heroic biography, Rediker in some literary activism of today, was able to get each of the four Quaker meetings that disowned him to reinstate Lay based on his historical research and biography. Another brilliant move by a people's historian! I highly recommend this book. Not long, very accessible, and very entertaining. A fascinating history. I never knew so much about the Quakers until after reading this. Do it! Don't delay. Read it.

Maia says

incredible man, well worth reading, races along. There is a part near the beginning where you get way too much Quaker bureaucracy and it needs some repetition deleting in the final section, but by gum what a man, what a life. If in doubt, read this! Both historically accurate research and a fast writing style, i'll definitely read more by this author. Will make you cry at the end. A complete hero. If you buy from Verso, you get ebook free with print book and you can download it forever after from their website

Oliver Bateman says

This was an excellent biography. I profiled its author, Marcus Rediker, in this Pacific Standard feature: <https://psmag.com/education/quaker-dw...>
