

Decision Activity: John Hunt

It is the twelfth month of the year 1776, and I am now thirty-six years of age. I am a farmer and minister living with my wife Esther Warrington and our children in Burlington County. Though three of our children died at an early age, we still have seven with us. I also spend time mending my neighbors' pumps.

Before my father Robert passed away, he was a first cousin to the minister John Woolman. In 1754, Reverend Woolman warned the Society of Friends that slavery is sinful, and he stated that "the slave trade harms families, prevents enslaved people from knowing God, and violates the Golden Rule."

During my town's meetings among Friends (Quakers), we have been discussing what to do about the "negroes"¹ in our community. On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, we had a meeting and afterwards I went to visit some neighbors to talk with them about owning enslaved persons.

I was appointed at the Evesham monthly meeting to convince my neighbors that it is wrong to have slaves and they should see to it that the children should be taught in the wisdom of God.

Earlier this year at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, it was mandated that all Quakers manumit their slaves; those who refused to do so would essentially be disowned. Some of the slaveholders in Burlington County were more resistant to this mandate, while others complied.

Recently, I heard that in the middle of the second month, 1776, John Hay and other men armed with clubs went to a "Negro" man's home near Haddonfield and tried to take away his son, but a violent fight ensued and they failed to do so.

I wonder if my neighbors are this resistant to ending slavery. Even though our new state of New Jersey has refused to end slavery, I do not know if Quakers can continue to allow it.

How should John Hunt act in response to Friends in his community who still hold slaves?

- a. Visit them privately and urge them to manumit the slaves.
- b. Visit them again with other Friends to interrogate them about having slaves.
- c. Address this issue as a whole community in a monthly town meeting.
- d. Leave them alone.

Is there a 'best approach' to change someone else's mind who has slaves?

- a. How do you argue with someone who believes that they are benefitting economically from slave ownership?
- b. How do you explain to a friend or neighbor that it is morally wrong by taking away someone's liberty?
- c. With America fighting for freedom and independence from England, should the emancipation of enslaved persons be one of the reasons for the American Revolution?
- d. Is the independence of enslaved persons and ending the slave trade related to the Declaration of Independence?

¹ Note that this was the language used by Hunt and others to describe African American people.