

On “The Most Belligerent Non-Resistant”

“I believe that man is created innately good; that his instincts are for good.”

These are the words of the woman who picks peas in the early morning because she finds “nothing so refreshing... as the odor of moist earth” (Hallowell 377). She is the same woman who stops mobs with her persuasion. This is Lucretia Mott.

I am a seventeen-year-old woman growing up in a time when politics is synonymous with chaos and change feels like it can only be bought by billionaires. Throughout the past two months, I have immersed in an intensive study of the life, letters, speeches and sermons of Lucretia Mott. I have often caught myself laughing aloud at her observations of the world and wholly absorbed by her profound reflections... often simultaneously. As we face human rights threats more unpredictable than many in the past decades, I find great solace in the history that shows us that as long as humans have created injustice, humans have been called to resistance. Lucretia knew that, beyond the darkness of her time, light would triumph. And she knew that for that day to come, she had to work relentlessly to be part of the change.

As an artist/activist, it is my aim to work relentlessly to seek people’s stories in an effort to mobilize people towards the “love [for] universal humanity” Lucretia herself held (“Selected Letters” 165). Though I rarely acknowledge it, I often find myself anxious about how I may impact the world as someone passionate about many issues and many modes of artistic expression. As a champion of gender reform, race reform, and any other reform she thought necessary, Lucretia’s philosophy has served as reassurance to me that people, and the injustices they face, are inherently interconnected. She did not limit herself to one issue, but rather regarded all injustices as superficial manifestations of a deeper “root of [a] corrupt tree”

("Lucretia Mott Speaks" 84). It was this root she confronted through one enduring feeling for humanity: belief.

Not only was this faith indicative of her Quaker upbringing, according to Lucretia, it was the most effective route toward positive change. "Rejecting, then, the doctrine of human depravity," she asserted, "denying that by nature we have wicked hearts, I have every confidence, every hope, in addressing an audience of unsophisticated minds, that they may be reached, because I know that the love of God has previously touched their hearts; that He has implanted there, a sense of justice and mercy, of charity and all goodness" ("Lucretia Mott Speaks" 49). While cynics often reacted to her view with the "charge of credulity" (Hallowell 126), as they have when I have expressed this same conviction, Lucretia's words encapsulate why belief in humanity is essential to belief in progress.

In this unknown, untethered state, our collective future, and my life within it, is unmapped. As I chart the current reality of injustice and realize my role as part of the change, I feel a strengthening tether to the life and legacy of Lucretia Mott. This connection is made all the more meaningful by the fact she is my ancestor.

JUNE 24th, 2022 - BOTSWANA - On a boat that feels the edge of the world, and its heart, my aunt receives a *ding* that spans this infinite distance:



Donald J. Trump ✓

@realDonaldTrump · 1h

After 50 years of failure, with nobody coming even close, I was able to kill Roe v. Wade, much to the “shock” of everyone, and for the first time put the Pro Life movement in a strong negotiating position over the Radicals that are willing to kill babies even into their 9th month, and beyond. Without me there would be no 6 weeks, 10 weeks, 15 weeks, or whatever is finally agreed to. Without me the pro Life movement would have just kept losing. Thank you President TRUMP!!!

It reminds us we are women in a country that has politicized our bodies. It reminds us that as far as we may travel, we will return to a country where reproductive rights are a geographical luxury. Though I have never needed abortion access in my life, all the strong parts of me become tender in an instant. I mourn for those I know and those I do not know. I feel connected to them, the women whose tears are falling on overturned hands. I feel deep disappointment. I feel deep love.

Unlike many of her contemporaries, Mott did not consider women’s rights to be an isolated campaign, but rather “a logical extension of interconnected humanitarian concerns” (Faulkner 4). Likewise, Mott did not believe that abolition and gender equality were disconnected struggles. On the contrary, she “insisted that feminism must include racial equality” (Faulkner 5). Her recognition of this intersectionality is equally poignant in the context of our own time as according to the latest available data from the Center for Disease Control, black women are over four times more likely than white women to terminate a pregnancy (Ramer). Conversely, six in ten black and indigenous women live in a state that has enacted restrictions to abortion access since the overturning of Roe v. Wade (Hill).

As Lucretia's words outline and the Dobbs vs. Jackson Women's Health Organization decision upholds, women's equal status is a fragile entity, disproportionate between geographical bounds and intersecting identities but present in the lives of all who are born or identify as women. Lucretia reflected in a timeless speech that "Women are degraded by the law, by the monopoly of the Church, and all the circumstances with which she is surrounded. She must therefore boldly affirm her rights" ("Lucretia Mott Speaks" 95). I do not believe the enduring nature of this history is a reason for loss of faith, but renewed hope. For if we have made small, bold steps forward in the past, we will continue to do so in the future. As Lucretia wisely instructed in her later years, "Young women of America, I want you to make yourselves acquainted with the history of the Woman's Rights movement... I want you to note the progress of this cause, and know now that Woman's redemption is a hand, yea, even at the doors" ("Lucretia Mott Speaks" 153).

MARCH 16th, 2024 - DOMINICAN REPUBLIC -

In this moment, a typical one as I wait for translation of the rapidfire Spanish around me, Moises poses a question.

It is the first day of the first year of Camp Constelación, a theatre camp I started for young people born in sugarcane communities (bateyes) of the Dominican Republic. Consisting of Haitian immigrants recruited by Central Romana, the sugarcane company whose ~\$150 million annual profit juxtaposes starkly with their employees' menial salary of \$4 per day (Kelly), the bateyes are home to over 200,000 people, those who cut sugarcane and their families who seek a better life in among the most impoverished communities on Earth (Martinez). Despite living in abject poverty, their culture is one of resilient joy and enduring faith. While these actors are new to the craft, they are dedicated.

There are the energetic young boys who chase each other and pitch balls across the field. There are the older girls who command their younger peers, serving as role models in the space. And there is the youngest girl, a curious fireball, who is the daughter of the others' teacher. They will become the story.

Moises is the director of the hospital whose own journey from a young boy supporting his family in a batey to a community leader inspired me to write the camp's first play about his life. Today, he is visiting the young leaders to offer his characteristic warmth and inspiration. As the kids stare up at him with admiration, he asks "Now, who here wants to be President?"

At first, several young boys' hands shoot up. Then, after a pause, the youngest girl's hand joins them. "Yo tambien!" she exclaims. Immediately, as if her words are a spark they have been trained to douse, the older girls shout down her hand.

"What did they say?" I ask Moises. "They said a woman can't be president," he replies. What I then feel is simultaneously galvanizing and paralyzing. I want to reverse this belief unequivocally, but I know that language won't be my only barrier. I want to point to my country or their country as evidence, but I cannot. In a nation where not only have no women been president, but where their people represent the largest stateless population in the Americas, where generations have been deported back to a gang-run country due to nativist orders, where even the models plastered on the walls of their grocery store are white, how do they find the strength to believe in a better life? How can I justify promising the possibility of their dreams in a country that does not see them as people, but as labor?

For now, I settle for futile words: “Women absolutely can be president. All of you can.”

And hope this experience will convince them that they can lead beyond a camp. And hope that portraying an extraordinary life will convince them that repetitive narratives can be broken. And hope their lives will be governed by their dreams and not their immigration status. And hope.

Lucretia held consistent hope throughout her lifetime in the goodness of people and the society they designed. She was living proof that individual investment and societal impact, though at times contradictory, are interconnected elements of an activist life. Her perspective on this coexistence is powerful to analyze as someone equally passionate about individuals’ stories as reforming the policies that govern them.

Characterized by historian Beverly Wilson Palmer as a “people person” [00:23:39], , Lucretia’s commitment to individual upliftment was reflected in both her words and actions. Once, after an elderly black woman was denied seating on a railroad car, a seventy-year-old Lucretia stood out in the freezing rain with her until the conductor allowed both inside (Hallowell 407). Another time, a man informed an enslaved mother, Jane Johnson, and her two children that because they had entered the state of Philadelphia with their enslaver, they were free. As an act of spite, the enslaver brought charges against the informant. When the trial was called, Jane Johnson jeopardized her newfound freedom to support the man who had facilitated it. And when she was escorted out of the room and hurried into a carriage towards safety, it was Mott’s home that was the destination (Hallowell 357).

Lucretia Mott’s granddaughter, Anna Davis Hallowell, who spent considerable time at the Mott home at 338 Arch St., describes this address as a codeword and a “well-known refuge” for those seeking shelter (Hallowell 326). As Hallowell describes, Mott’s home “became the centre to which thronged the numerous relatives and friends residing in Philadelphia, and innumerable

strangers, of high and low degree, who came to the city. Its hospitable doors opened equally wide to rich and poor, known and unknown, white and black” (Hallowell, 327). Cognizant of segregation even within abolitionist societies, Lucretia consciously disrupted social expectation by inviting black women and men into her home and organizations as lead voices and friends. She prominently featured the “Am I Not a Man and a Brother” antislavery medallion adapted to feature an enslaved woman and read “Am I Not a Woman and a Sister,” placing her focus on intersectionality at the figurative and literal center of discussion.

Her belief in equal worth did not extend solely to those of the same ideological contours. Once, while speaking at an Anti-Slavery convention in New York, a mob disrupted the convention and began physically harassing the speakers as they left. Lucretia asked the gentleman accompanying her to escort some of the more nervous ladies to safety. When asked who would do the same for her, she calmly placed her hand on the roughest of the mob and replied “This man. He will see me safe through” (Hallowell 133). Miraculously, he did. The next day, she wound up in the same restaurant as the leader of the mob. Upon seeing him, she smiled, sat by him, and they had a civil discussion. He was shocked to learn that she was the “ultraist” he had learned to fear, yet after their discussion, reflected “Well, she’s a good, sensible woman.” Her fearlessness in life-threatening situations is the ultimate testament to her belief that beneath a violent exterior, all had a spirit of empathy. Just because abolitionists and pro-slavery mob leaders were not supposed to civically interface does not mean Lucretia was dissuaded in the least from doing exactly this with faith in place of fear.

However, as Dr. Carol Faulkner underscores, “Despite her humanitarianism, Mott was a committed activist, not a gentle Quaker” (Faulkner 116). Although she held herself and others to a firm standard of individual accountability, she ultimately felt that proper anti-slavery work required a commitment to “destroy the system [of slavery], root and branch, to lay the axe at the

root of the corrupt tree” (“Lucretia Mott Speaks” 81). Mott herself offers critical context to this philosophy. In her essay “What is Anti-Slavery Work?”, she wrote that for years “my sympathy was so wrought upon by the cases of peculiar hardship... that, without much reflection, I contributed my mite toward the purchase of slaves [as a means of emancipation]” (Faulkner 116). Upon further reflection, she realized that by contributing financially to the system, she was legitimizing it. From that point onward, she devoted her abolitionist efforts to emancipation of “the whole class” of slaves,” not merely “a few isolated cases.” Lucretia’s own words make it statistically and morally clear that self-emancipation was not the ultimate goal of Mott’s activist campaign: it was total reform.

As historian Dr. Ikuko Asaka summarizes in a peer-reviewed article for the *Journal of the Early Republic*, “In Mott’s mind, the Underground Railroad, much like the Liberian endeavor [of repatriation to Africa], contributed little to the paramount effort to eradicate the institution of slavery” (Asaka 2). In questioning her perception of the Underground Railroad, Asaka raises a valuable complication of Mott’s allegiance to individual inner light above the principles of the greater emancipation movement. As Asaka postulates, “In Mott’s mind, slaves’ individual acquisitions of freedom might have signaled a fundamental conflict with the emancipation process [Mott’s organization, the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society] set out for itself: cleansing the nation of slavery through female moral suasion” (Asaka 6). Asaka’s proposition is unique in its implication that intersectionality between gender and abolitionism was not just a circumstantial benefit, but an active consideration in Mott’s judgement of what constituted “anti-slavery work.” This statement, fortified by her reliance on Faulkner’s description of Mott as an “ideologue” with “disregard for the individuality of slaves” (Faulkner 116), poses a necessary counter narrative to the understanding of Mott’s activist ethos. While an avid opponent of hypocrisy, Mott’s belief in equal individual worth frequently came into tension with her

commitment to a puristic movement that vowed to not strengthen the opposition with concessions, even if those concessions represented the lives of individuals.

In their entirety, Asaka's claims and Hallowell's stories are not utterly opposed, but rather work in tandem to characterize a life where individual freedom was an ever-present and prioritized reality, yet not the central aim of organized agitation. Mott's voice and, most essentially, her courage to use it, affirmed the dignity of individuals just as it chipped away at the root of the systems that initiated the violence. Just as she believed in the fundamental goodness of individuals, she believed in the potential of society and its ability to change.

JUNE 29th, 2024 - POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN - WASHINGTON, D.C. -

As we slog through the capital of change, we wonder how we will find the protest. Then we hear music: a gospel choir. We are now called not by the words of justice, but by its soul. We know where we're going.

As we move deeper into the heart of the crowd, a bishop assumes the stage. Then a rabbi. Then an imam. Then an indigenous spiritual leader. Amidst a sea of people that extends beyond my sightline, I hold the reality that we are united by nothing except for the "love [for] universal humanity" Lucretia spoke of ("Selected Letters" 165). Like her, we stand for indigenous rights, voting rights, equal wages, prison reform, and nonviolence not as disconnected efforts, but as an interconnected campaign of love.

Handing out water bottles to the heat-exhausted crowd, I am met with people as diverse as the vision and visionaries of America. As the gospel choir sings, we seek the spirit of something true.

“Take back the mic and tell the truth / there’s power in our vote / it starts with me and you.”

I sing. I scream. I grieve. I hope. I hold.

I am filled.

We know where we’re going.

AUGUST 24th, 1848 - 338 ARCH St. - PHILADELPHIA -

In the summer of 1848, a women’s rights convention is imagined at a tea party. Six days later, three hundred women and men gather. Lucretia “urge[s] convention participants to consider the relationship between women’s rights and other reforms, including anti-slavery, prison reform, temperance, and pacifism” (Faulkner 5). She then signs her name at the top of a series of demands: the Declaration of Sentiments. While the Seneca Falls convention will someday be hailed as one of the most significant moments in the 19th century female liberation movement, christening the town as the “Birthplace of Women’s Rights,” as Lucretia Mott sits at her desk, recounting the summer, it is simply one of many forward motions of justice.

The interactions of the summer, spanning the “kindness and hospitality” of self-emancipated communities in Canada, the spiritual worship of the Seneca Nation, and the convention halls of Seneca Falls and Rochester, will lead Lucretia to one fundamental conclusion: “All these subjects of reform are kindred in their nature” (“Selected Letters” 165). And conversely, according to Mott, so are their solutions. By Mott’s estimate, working for progress in one subject of reform “will tend to strengthen and nerve the mind for all.” This conviction conveys Mott’s

belief in energized change just as it conveys the mutualistic benefit of working for justice across activist spheres.

Mott's critical insight into the intersectionality of issues and their solutions will reverberate through generations. Her belief in humanity and progress will be present when suffrage reformer Alice Paul writes the Equal Rights Amendment and names its first draft after Lucretia Mott. It will be present in the civil rights movement when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. argues for the "moral right" and affirms that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (Letter from Birmingham Jail). It will be present when Roe v. Wade is overturned, when poor people refuse to work for a country that hasn't worked for them, and when young people dream of their future.

And one day, in the cyclical evolution of time, her descendant will look into her words and see reflections of her present, her voice, and her calling to fuse art and activism for change. And one day, she too will walk the moist earth and see people and progress through her own lens. And one day I too will speak and live a life of belief.

Works Cited

Asaka, Ikuko. "Lucretia Mott and the Underground Railroad: The Transatlantic World of a Radical American

Woman." *Journal of the Early Republic*, vol. 38, no. 4, Dec. 2018, pp. 613–42. EBSCOhost, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.2018.0067>. In her peer-reviewed article published in the *Journal of the Early Republic* and found in the database EBSCO, Dr. Ikuko Asaka, an associate professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, explores a niche of Lucretia Mott's activism that few have dedicated significant time to: her perspective on the Underground Railroad. In doing so, Asaka raises deeper questions about Mott's commitment to individuals vs. society and belief in the individual agency of enslaved people to engender their own emancipation. In the canon of work about Mott, this is among the most recent. Asaka's characterization often seems biased towards generalizations about the latent racism of white abolitionists that Mott's own words and unusual belief in racial equality do not justify. Apart from this bias, her paper is well-researched and examines a revealing contradiction within Mott's ideology.

Faulkner, Carol. "Lucretia Mott's Heresy." University of Pennsylvania Press. 2011. Accessed 12 Jan. 2025.

Faulkner's biography is a comprehensive and compelling account of Lucretia's intersectional activism and the reactions it provoked. Dr. Faulkner is an Associate Professor of History at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University. She was also the former research assistant of Beverly Wilson Palmer. Any bias that infiltrates her words is balanced by consistent integration of an array of sources, the most effective of them being Mott's own multifaceted language and actions. Faulkner's timeless biography spans from the birth to the death of Lucretia Mott.

Hallowell, Anna Davis, ed., *James and Lucretia Mott: Life and Letters, with Portraits*, Houghton Mifflin

Co.,

Boston, 1884. Accessed 30 Jan. 2025. Anna Davis Hallowell brings unique perspective to the first biography of Lucretia Mott, published four years after her death, as her granddaughter. The stories of Mott's life, rooted in the same places where she spent meaningful time with her grandmother and grandfather, are rarely as vivid as in this biography. She was aware of her own bias and noted of her task, and the honesty she sought to keep, that "An artist in painting a likeness is not obliged to portray blemishes any further than may be necessary to his design." The biography spans from generations before the birth of Lucretia and James to their remembrance in death. Hallowell's timeless characterization of her grandmother, complete with the letters and speeches she includes, serves as a foundational text in the canon of secondary depictions.

Hill, Latoya; Artiga, Samantha; Ranji, Usha; et. al. "What are the Implications of the Dobbs Ruling for Racial

Disparities?" The Kaiser Family Foundation. 24 Apr. 2024. Accessed 13 Feb. 2025.

[https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/what-are-the-implications-of-the-dobbs-ruling-or-racial-disparities/#:~:text=About%20six%20in%20ten%20Black,%25\)%20women%20ages%2018%2D49..](https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/what-are-the-implications-of-the-dobbs-ruling-or-racial-disparities/#:~:text=About%20six%20in%20ten%20Black,%25)%20women%20ages%2018%2D49..) Self-described as "the independent source for health policy research, polling, and news," the Kaiser Family Foundation published on its website a thoroughly-researched report on the social, scientific, and political implications of Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization. Their findings are compiled from data from 33 reporting areas evaluated for their accuracy and form. Published in 2024, the is comparatively very recent and therefore reflects data as close to the present as are available.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. Penguin Classics, 2018. Accessed 2 Feb. 2025.

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s renowned speech is an essential text in the study of social justice. His words offer a critical perspective in the study of activist movements past and present. The insights he offered from behind the bars of oppression embody enduring belief in humanity and belief in the interconnectivity of all injustice and motions for progress.

Martinez, Julia Hasbún. "Proyecto Inter-agencial sobre Seguridad Humana en los Bateyes de la República

Dominicana (ACNUR, PNUD, UNICEF), Reporte de Estudio Línea Base. United Nations Development Programme. June 2014. Accessed 11 Feb. 2024.

<https://www.undp.org/es/dominican-republic/publicaciones/reporte-de-estudio-de-linea-base-bateyes>. This United Nations collaboration report undertakes the quantitative and qualitative analysis of life in the bateyes of the Dominican Republic. Spanning agencies under the banner of the United Nations Development Program, this relatively recent research offers critical scholarly analysis of the circumstances within the sugarcane communities of the Dominican Republic through tangible numerical breakdowns.

Palmer, Beverly Wilson; Greene, Dana; et. al., *Lucretia Mott Speaks: The Essential Speeches and Sermons*.

University of Illinois, 2017. Accessed 2 Feb. 2025. Collated by the leading contemporary Lucretia Mott scholars, this volume of Mott's speeches and sermons offers chronological exposure to primary source documents. Composed of entirely primary source documents with the exception of a brief introduction, this volume minimizes bias and leverages first hand experience to tell the story of her public life through her extemporaneous speech. As they did not

have access to the verbatim record of every speech, they also highlighted descriptions from minute-keepers and listeners.

Palmer, Beverly Wilson. *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago. 2002. Accessed 5 Jan. 2025. As a Pomona College research associate and documentary

historian, Wilson Palmer has dedicated years to compiling the selected letters of numerous radicals

who aren't prominently featured in history textbooks. Wilson Palmer's compilation of Lucretia Mott's

letters is the most comprehensive on the market. She traveled all around the world ensuring not one revelatory letter was missed. The ambition and dedication required in that process are evident

in this ambitious and dedicated collection.

Palmer, Beverly Wilson. *Personal interview with Beverly Wilson Palmer*. January 12, 2025.

Trump, Donald [@realdonaldtrump]. "After 50 years of failure, with nobody coming even close, I was able to

kill Roe v. Wade...". *Truth Social*. May 17, 2023, 8:35 AM. Accessed 10 Feb. 2025. While posted

one year after the overturning of Roe v. Wade, Trump's victory speech casts elucidating light on the

political motives behind the decision and the reaction of joy shared by him and his anti-choice colleagues. The form in which he communicated his words further demonstrates the casual

triumph

which the decision publicly represented to him.

Ramer S, Nguyen AT, Hollier LM, Rodenhizer J, Warner L, Whiteman MK. Abortion Surveillance — United

States, 2022. MMWR Surveill Summ 2024;73(No. SS-7):1–28. DOI:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss7307a1>. This report, from the CDC website, contains the findings extrapolated from data shared by forty-eight state and district aggregate health centers across the country. It is the latest published report of its kind. The work of the authors provides a crucial data perspective to a controversial medical topic. Specifications provided regarding the socioeconomic identities of patients provide fact-based insight into the disproportionate demand of certain demographics.