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# The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 22.04: Winter 2013

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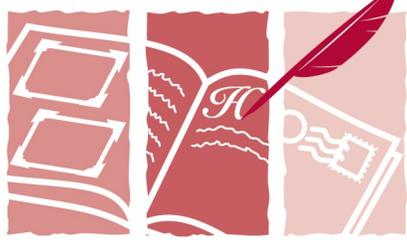
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# The Joint Archives *Quarterly*

Volume 22 Number 4

Winter 2013

## *The Life and Legacy of A. J. Muste*

By Madalyn Northuis

On February 22, 1967, Hope College honored the life and work of A. J. Muste, a pacifist and alumnus of the class of 1905. Muste had died eleven days earlier on Saturday, February 11. At the school's tribute service, the college's president, Calvin A. VanderWerf, delivered a short memorial address and proudly declared that Muste "was this nation's most articulate and most effective pacifist," who, "labored full time and full energy—with all his material, intellectual, and spiritual resources, for Peace on Earth."<sup>1</sup> Muste's dedication to pacifism was not only recognized by the Hope community, but by labor leaders and politicians on both sides of the Iron Curtain, fellow pacifists, friends, family members, and devoted followers from around the globe as well. Thus, for a brief moment in the midst of the Cold War, the diverse global community set aside their differences in order to mourn the loss of Muste, one of the world's most vocal and influential advocates for peace, justice, equality, and brotherly love.

Before receiving the nickname A. J., or the prestigious title "American Gandhi," America's most vocal pacifist was given the name Abraham Johannes Muste. He was born to Martin and Adriana Muste in the Netherlands, in the small town of Zierzee, Zeeland, in January 1885. Muste had lived in the Netherlands for six years when his parents decided to emigrate from the Netherlands to the United States. Adriana's brothers had recently settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and were eager to have their favorite sister and her young family near them once again.

While the long journey began as an exciting adventure, the thrill of the experience diminished when Adriana became ill. Upon their arrival in New York harbor, she was quarantined in a local hospital until a doctor deemed her healthy enough to travel. Within a month, Adriana recovered her health and the family was allowed to embark on the final leg of their journey. They traveled by train from New York City to the Dutch community of Grand Rapids.



Shortly after settling into a house on Quimby Street, Muste began attending a parochial school affiliated with the Reformed Church. However, after two years at the private institution, his parents decided to enroll Muste and his younger sister in the local public school for financial reasons. At the public school, Muste flourished as a student. He quickly mastered the English language. In his autobiography, Muste boasted about being the best speller and reader in his class. He credited his academic success to his teachers, who challenged him and cultivated a

lifelong love of learning in him that never diminished.

As a young boy and teenager, Muste's passion for academia was matched only by his zealous devotion to Christianity. By the age of twelve, he was composing and delivering original sermonettes. He was confident in the fact that he was predestined to become a preacher. In 1898, at age thirteen, the young boy became a member of Fourth Reformed Church in Grand Rapids.

*(continued on page 2)*

## From the Director



In this issue of the *Quarterly* we introduce you to the life of Abraham Muste, a 1905 Hope College graduate, through the writing of Madalyn Northuis, a junior at Hope College and one of our four student assistants. After processing the Muste Lecture Series archival collection, a recent donation from retired professor of biology Dr. Donald Cronkite, I asked Madalyn to write about Muste's interesting life. I know you will be as pleased as I was with her talent for historical writing.

One of our former student assistants, Anne Jamieson, a 2012 Hope College graduate, has decided to pursue a graduate degree in archives at Dominican University. She is currently interning at the McGreal Center at Dominican. My suspicion is that her interest in becoming a professional archivist came from working in the archives on the family papers of Dr. Donald Luidens. We wish her luck with her degree.

Geoffrey D. Reynolds

### *The Life and Legacy of A. J. Muste (continued from page 1)*

After becoming a member of the Church, Muste applied and was admitted into Hope Preparatory School as a ministry student. When he completed preparatory school, Muste enrolled in Hope College. During the eight years Muste spent at Hope, he excelled in the classroom and was involved in numerous extra-curricular activities. He served as the school's first athletic director, while playing football and baseball, and captained the basketball team as well. Muste wrote for the *Anchor*, won the Hope College oratorical contest as a sophomore, and placed second in the interstate oratorical competition. In addition to excelling in school, Muste also held several jobs. He led Bible studies, Sunday school classes, and sold Bibles, a job he strongly disliked. He also worked at the Hope College library, wrapped presents during the holidays, worked at the Quimby Furniture Factory, and served as an assistant to Holland's coroner.

Muste graduated from Hope in 1905 at the age of twenty. He was valedictorian of his class. Prior to graduating, he had applied and was accepted into New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS), which is located in New Jersey. However, instead of continuing on with his schooling, Muste decided to defer his enrollment for one year so he could enter seminary with a friend from Hope who was one year behind Muste in school. He also

wished to put off moving to New Brunswick so he could continue to court his college sweetheart, Anna Huizenga. Anna's family was from Iowa and she was to return to there after graduation. In order to remain close to Anna, Muste accepted a teaching job at the Northwestern Classical Academy in Orange City, Iowa. During the school week he taught English and Greek, and when the final bell rang on Fridays, Muste would frequently board a train bound for Anna's hometown.

In 1906, Muste left his teaching position and Anna in Iowa in order to move to New Jersey for seminary. As part of his training at NBTS, Muste served as supply preacher at Middle Collegiate Church in the East Side of Manhattan in the summer of 1908. This church was located in the slums of New York City, and it was the first time Muste had ever witnessed such shocking living conditions. In his autobiography, Muste wrote that his experience at Middle Collegiate Church heightened his awareness of the worker and union strikes that were occurring throughout New York City. While he was not directly involved in these strikes, the conflicts intrigued the eternal scholar. In order to gain a better understanding of these struggles, Muste read radical literature. Eventually, he came to support the workers and their struggles.

His newfound interest in socialism and union activities did not appear to impact his religious beliefs, standing in the community, or his relationship with Anna. In June 1909, Muste graduated from NBTS and was asked to serve as the pastor of Fort Washington Collegiate Church in New York City. That month he also married Anna, and together the couple would have three children.



*While serving at the Fort Washington Collegiate Church, c. 1909*

Within three years of taking the job at Fort Washington Collegiate Church, however, Muste shifted his political alliances. He went from being a member of the Republican Party to one of the Socialist Party. In support of his new political affiliation, Muste cast his vote for the Socialist Party's candidate, Eugene V. Debs, in the 1912 Presidential election.

When he was not preaching or reading radical literature, Muste found time to take classes at Union Theological Seminary (UTS), which was near his church. By 1913, the classes he had managed to fit into his busy schedule allowed Muste to receive a Bachelor of Divinity from

UTS. The young pastor and scholar graduated *magna cum laude*. In his autobiography, Muste claimed that the professors at UTS introduced him to a new way of interpreting religion and history, which ultimately forced him to question and reevaluate the belief system he had adhered to as a youth. By 1914, Muste asserted that he no longer believed in Calvinist theology.

The years Muste had spent in New York City as supply preacher for a slum community, student at UTS, and minister at Fort Washington Collegiate Church had significantly impacted his views on religion, politics, and society. The once

devout Republican Calvinist was becoming a budding Socialist, interested in the plight of the working class. He

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***“The moral of all this may be that there is no telling what goes into the education of a pacifist.”***

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was also a minister questioning the veracity of his religion. These inner conflicts, particularly the doubts Muste had regarding Calvinist theology, made it difficult for him to continue to serve his RCA congregation. As a result, he left his position at Fort Washington Collegiate Church in 1914 for a post at a Congregational Church in Newtonville, Massachusetts.

Around the time the Muste family left for Newtonville, World War I erupted in Europe. Despite claims that the United States would not enter the conflict, Muste believed that America’s involvement in WWI was inevitable. As a pastor, the imminent threat of war forced Muste to determine if he could support America’s participation in WWI while continuing to preach on the subject of brotherly love. Muste contemplated this dilemma for nearly a year before America’s increasing involvement in WWI forced him to take a public stand: he was a Christian pacifist.

Unlike the earlier changes Muste had made to his belief system, his pacifist tendencies had not arisen as a result of his experience in the slums of New York or in the classrooms of UTS. Rather, Muste believed that his character had always consisted of certain tendencies that caused him to favor pacifism. He felt that the commandment, “thou shalt not kill,” had been written on his heart since childhood. Since the commandment was deeply imbedded within him, Muste understood that life was precious and violence only robbed individuals of this gift. Although he recognized that he had pacifist tendencies, Muste also acknowledged that he may not have become a pacifist if the advent of WWI had not forced him to take a stand for or against war.

After he personally recognized that he was a pacifist, Muste asserted that the “too solid a dose of Calvinism,”

he had received as a child and teen compelled him to publicly acknowledge these feelings.<sup>3</sup> As a once active participant in the RCA, Muste had learned two valuable lessons. The first was that religion and the words of the Bible must be taken seriously; the second was that one must detest “the sham which enables a person to preach what he does not try desperately to practice.”<sup>4</sup> For reasons unknown, Muste, who no longer believed in Calvinist theology, was unable to cast off these particular teachings. As a result, his belief in the absolute truth of the Bible made it impossible for him to provide his congregation with a biblical justification for the conflict because he did not believe one existed. Furthermore, his opinion that it was disgraceful for pastors to lead a life based on values that differed from those one supported while behind the pulpit led him to reveal to his congregation that he was a Christian pacifist.

At first, Muste’s congregation accepted the fact that their pastor was a Christian pacifist. However, when the U.S. officially became entrenched in WWI in 1917, the relationship between Muste and his congregation began to deteriorate. As young men from the church community were wounded or killed, the soldiers’ family members turned to their pastor for counsel and comfort. Yet, because of his personal beliefs, Muste found that he was unable to provide this service. His congregation also agreed that Muste was incapable of properly serving their needs. Due to their differences in opinions, Muste resigned in December 1917.

After Muste left the Congregational church in Newtonville, he volunteered his services at the Boston chapter of the Civil Liberties Bureau, an organization that defended the rights of political and pacifist war dissenters. He also attended Quaker meetings and became more involved in the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), an interfaith peace organization, which he had initially joined in 1916.

In 1918, Muste became associated with a group known as “The Comradeship.” When Muste joined the group, the members of this organization were attempting to find ways in which they could lead a life that clearly embodied the spirit and message of Jesus. They desired to combine their Christian and pacifist beliefs with their determination to rid the world of economic and racial inequalities.

In 1919, “The Comradeship” received their first opportunity to apply their beliefs to a real world situation when textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, went on strike. Muste was asked to become the Executive Secretary of the strike committee. His acceptance of the position placed him in a leadership role. Together with

other members of “The Comradeship,” Muste convinced the strikers to adhere to a pact of non-violence. For sixteen weeks, he joined the textile workers on the picket line daily. They were beaten, verbally abused, threatened by machine guns, and arrested. In spite of the daily brutality they were forced to endure, the textile workers and their leaders remained calm. The laborers’ refusal to violently lash back for sixteen weeks had exhausted both the workers and their embittered employers. As a result, both sides were willing to meet and reach an agreement. In the end, the agreement was in favor of the laborers, who received a shortened workweek and a twelve percent increase in their salary.

Following the victory at Lawrence, Muste accepted the position of general secretary of the Amalgamated Textile Workers of America. He held this post until 1921, when he moved to northern New York in order to become a teacher at the newly established Brookwood Labor College. Brookwood offered a two-year program for labor leaders who wished to receive a general education and formal training in how to appropriately handle labor struggles. Muste taught at Brookwood for twelve years, leaving the institution in 1933 at age forty-eight.

By the time he left the labor school, Muste no longer considered himself a Christian or a pacifist. His participation in churches and Quaker meetings had significantly declined. Moreover, he believed he had become a “caricature of a Christian pacifist and only a half-baked revolutionary.”<sup>5</sup> He could no longer be a Christian pacifist and a revolutionary; he had to choose between the two. At this point in his life, Muste chose the path of revolution. He accepted that this path would more than likely cause him to become involved in violent struggles and recognized that he had to relinquish his Christian beliefs.

In the early 1930s, Muste’s decision to march down the path of revolution converted him from Christian Pacifism to Marxist-Leninism. As a Marxist-Leninist, he devoted his time to organizing strikes, such as the 1934 Toledo Auto-Lite strike. Muste also became the leader of the American Workers Party, a small political organization that became known as the “Mustite” movement. In 1934, the “Mustite” movement joined forces with the Trotskyist movement, and the two became the Trotskyist Workers Party of America. Muste was an active member of this group for two years. However, in 1936, he began to question whether or not he should continue down the path of revolution.

While Muste was doubting his involvement in radical activities, the friends he and his wife had become acquainted with over the years were raising money in

order to send the couple on a European vacation. In June 1936, Muste and his wife embarked on their journey to Europe. When the couple departed, Muste was a Marxist-Leninist. However, after a mystical experience in a Parisian church, Muste returned to America a reconverted Christian Pacifist. Upon his return, he rejoined the Fellowship of Reconciliation and in 1937 Muste was reoriented with the mainstream Protestant church.

Like his first conversion to Christian Pacifism, his re-conversion to Christian Pacifism occurred as the threat of war intensified in Europe. Before World War II began, Muste focused all of his efforts on developing a pacifist movement that he hoped would prevent another world war war



*Lecturing at Pendle Hill, c. 1940*

unsuccessful and America became involved in the conflict in 1941, he turned his attention to advocating on behalf of conscientious objectors and draft resisters. During WWII, Muste also became the executive secretary at FOR and sought to unite and promote tolerance amongst pacifist groups of different beliefs.

After the conclusion of the war in September 1945, Muste’s focus shifted once again and he became deeply concerned about the long-term implications of nuclear warfare. His anxiety about the potential threat of a nuclear war drove him to contact the atomic scientists who had worked on the atomic bombs that had destroyed the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Together, Muste and these scientists established the Society for Social Responsibility in the Sciences in 1949.

In addition to reaching out to scientists, Muste also established relationships with church leaders. In 1950, he helped create the Church Peace Mission, an organization that provided educational opportunities to church leaders that were interested in learning more about biblical pacifism. Muste also instructed civil rights activists on the power of non-violence. Through his connections to civil rights leaders, Muste was introduced to Martin Luther King, Jr., and became one of King’s most respected advisors.

Muste retired from FOR in 1953 and a year later, his wife, Anna, died. Following her death, Muste’s



*Protesting at the Atomic Energy Convention, 1963*

involvement in Cold War politics increased. He assumed leadership of the Committee for Nonviolent Action. Through this committee, Muste organized unique protests against the testing of nuclear weapons. He and his fellow members sailed small rowboats into nuclear test zones and hopped barbed wire fences into restricted

American nuclear plants. In 1961, he organized a march from San Francisco to Moscow. Along the way, the group spread the message of pacifism to small towns and communities before they presented their final demonstration in Moscow's Red Square. As a result of these radical protests, Muste and his followers were arrested on numerous occasions. Yet, imprisonment never deterred Muste from concocting a new plan to spread the messages of peace and the non-violence.



*Peace March in New York City, 1963*

In 1966, he traveled to Saigon, Vietnam, with a group of pacifists in order to lead a public demonstration. The group was arrested and deported from the foreign country. Yet, within a few months of being thrown out of Vietnam, Muste returned to the country with three religious leaders in order to meet with Ho Chi Minh, the prime minister of the Republic of Vietnam and a radical communist leader. Before their meeting concluded, Ho Chi Minh asked Muste to invite President Lyndon Johnson to Hanoi, Vietnam, so the two leaders could discuss plans for peace. Muste wrote to President Johnson but never received a reply.

Two weeks after returning to New York from Vietnam, Muste went to his doctor complaining of sharp pains in his back. He was prescribed painkillers, but the agony persisted. On February 10, 1967, he was admitted to the hospital and the doctors discovered he was suffering from an aneurism. A medical team prepped him for surgery, but Muste was declared dead before reaching

the operating table. He passed away on February 11, 1967, at age eighty-two. Only his son, John Muste, survived him.

As news of his death spread, members of the global community were united for a rare and brief moment in the midst of the Cold War over the loss of one of the most vocal peace activists. Labor leaders, Communists, civil rights activists, pacifists, family members, and friends mourned publicly at the memorial services that were held throughout America.

Those who were unable to attend expressed their sentiments in telegrams and letters of condolence. Ho Chi Minh wrote that he was “profoundly grieved to learn the demise of A. J. Muste, an outstanding fighter for peace.... [and] a loyal and valiant friend of Vietnamese people.”<sup>6</sup> Robert Kennedy declared that Muste “was one of those rare men of whom it can be said that our inability to follow his example speaks more to his excellence than to the limitations in ourselves.”<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. remembered Muste as “one of the most noble lovers of peace and servants of the cause of peace on earth among all men to grace our violent era.”<sup>8</sup> He also expressed his belief that “the whole world should mourn the death of this peacemaker, for we desperately need his sane and sober spirit in our time.”<sup>9</sup> Muste was not only remembered by the most notable politicians and activists of his time, but by the men and women whom had stood beside him on the picket line and the march from San Francisco to Moscow in 1961. His students and colleagues at Brookwood Labor College also expressed their condolences and fondly recalled the lively spirit and dedication of their teacher and co-worker.

Throughout his life, Muste changed political positions and religious views numerous times. In an attempt to explain why he frequently altered which ideology and or party he chose to align himself with, Muste wrote:

“In a certain sense, there is no ‘explanation’ for the fact that one who had been as deeply convinced a pacifist as I was...ceased to hold that position [in the late 1920s]...Insofar as I can make this episode intelligible to myself and others, the ‘explanation’ goes like this: I have to *experience* ideas rather than *think* them. I have to learn what they mean in practice, have to act them out.”<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, all of the different ideas Muste chose to *experience* allowed him to become an influential pacifist leader who was respected and trusted by socialists, civil rights activists, pacifist, and a number of influential American politicians. Thus, when he passed away, the

global community was willing to overlook the constant shifts in his personal beliefs, and set aside their own differences, for a brief moment, in order to mourn the loss of A. J. Muste, the twentieth century's most influential and dedicated pacifist.

(Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup>C. A. Vanderwerf, "Muste," Address, A.J. Muste Memorial Service from Hope College, Holland, February 22, 1967.

<sup>2</sup>A. J. Muste, "Not So Long Ago: Autobiography Part 3: The Emigrant Becomes and Immigrant," *Liberation* (1957): 16.

<sup>3</sup>A. J. Muste, "Not So Long Ago: Autobiography Part 4: I Discover I am a Pacifist," *Liberation* (1957): 19.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 18.

<sup>5</sup>A. J. Muste, "Not So Long Ago: Autobiography Part 17: Transit to Trotzkyism," *Liberation* (1959): 18.

<sup>6</sup>Ho Chi Minh, "In Mourning," *In Memoriam* (1967): 28.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Kennedy, "In Mourning," *In Memoriam* (1967): 28.

<sup>8</sup>Martin Luther King Jr., "A Beacon of Light," *In Memoriam A. J. Muste* (1967): 1.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>A. J. Muste, "Not So Long Ago: Autobiography Part 17: Transit to Trotzkyism," *Liberation* (1959): 18.



The study alcove, "Stop, Look, Listen," located on the second floor of the Van Wylen Library at Hope College, was dedicated to Muste in 1991. In addition to the Joint Archives of Holland materials, the library has a number of Muste resources, and an annual Muste Lecture Series is offered by Hope College.

## Collections Now Open

**H12-1814.** Lampen, Albert Edgar.

Papers, 1897-1932. 0.25 linear ft.

Grandson of Johannes "John" Douma. The collection contains a scrapbook and military papers of Johannes "John" Douma (1847-1939), veteran of the U.S. Civil War, 24th Michigan Infantry, and guard for President Abraham Lincoln's body, 1897-1932.

**H11-1771.** Fakeye, Lamidi O. 1928-1996.

Records, 1995-1999, 0.25 linear ft.

Lamidi Olonade Fakeye was born in Nigeria in 1928. He was born into a family of wood-carvers and was a fifth-generation carver. His father and older brother taught him to carve. He left home for his education and at the age of 20 met Father Kevin Carroll, who hired him as a carver. Later he was apprenticed to a famous woodcarver, George Arowoogun. Fakeye became a teacher and independent artist, having several apprentices of his own. In 1960, his work became known in America. In 1973, he carved two 12' doors for the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. An exhibition of sixty of Fakeye's carvings were shown at Western Michigan University in 1987. Hope College had an exhibition of his work in 1996 and also published his autobiography in conjunction with this show. The collection consists primarily of correspondence, photographs, and final manuscript of Fakeye's book, *A Retrospective Exhibition and Autobiography*.

**W97-1221.** Huizenga Family.

Papers, 1894-1984. 1.50 linear ft.

Henry Huizenga was born in New Groningen, Michigan, on January 8, 1873. He was a graduate of Hope College in 1893 and Western Theological Seminary in 1896. Huizenga was married to Susan Antvelink (born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on July 26, 1875), on July 1, 1896, at Seventh Reformed Church on Leonard Street in Grand Rapids by Rev. J. W. Muilenburg. After receiving his degree from Western Theological Seminary, Huizenga became a Reformed Church in America missionary to Vellore, India, and Baptist-sponsored missionary to Shanghai, China. He later served as president of Shanghai College. He is remembered for writing and publishing the Gospel of St. John in poetic verse. Dorothy Huizenga, whose photograph albums enlightened the collection, was the niece of Henry and Susan Huizenga and the daughter of Gerrit Huizenga and Kate Teller Huizinga. She was born in Vellore, India, graduated from Iowa State, and was a teacher of home economics at Baraga, Michigan, and Godfrey Lee in Wyoming, Michigan. The collection, donated by Elaine Watterson, the great-niece of Susie Antvelink Huizenga, consists of correspondence, photograph albums, Shanghai College yearbook, the Gospel of St. John written in poetry, and various materials associated with the Huizenga family. Though most of the collection deals with Henry and Susan Huizenga, it also contains a fair quantity of material of Gerrit and Kate Huizenga and Dorothy Huizenga. Much of the correspondence is addressed to Mr. and Mrs. E. J. Zevalkink and Mrs. G. J. Antvelink. Subjects include: Foreign Missions, Vellore, Gudwal, India, China, Reformed Church Missionary, and Shanghai College.

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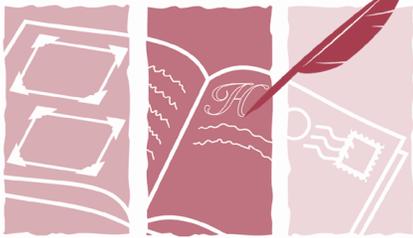
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*A. J. Muste after being arrested at the Army Induction Center, New York City, December 15, 1966*