



# The Beautiful Soul of John Woolman, Apostle of Abolition

*Thomas P. Slaughter*

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# The Beautiful Soul of John Woolman, Apostle of Abolition

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A biography of the famous eighteenth-century Quaker whose abolitionist fervor and spiritual practice made him a model for generations of Americans

John Woolman (1720–72) was perhaps the most significant American of his age, though he was not a famous politician, general, or man of letters, and never held public office. A humble Quaker tailor in New Jersey, he became a prophetic voice for the entire Anglo-American world when he denounced the evils of slavery in Quaker meetings, then in essays and his *Journal*, first published in 1774. In this illuminating new biography, Thomas P. Slaughter goes behind those famous texts to locate the sources of Woolman's political and spiritual power.

Slaughter's penetrating work shows how this plainspoken mystic transformed himself into a prophetic, unforgettable figure. Devoting himself to extremes of self-purification—dressing only in white, refusing to ride horses or in horse-drawn carriages—Woolman might briefly puzzle people; but his preaching against slavery, rum, tea, silver, forced labor, war taxes, and rampant consumerism was infused with a benign confidence that ordinary people could achieve spiritual perfection, and this goodness gave his message persuasive power and enduring influence. Placing Woolman in the full context of his times, Slaughter paints the portrait of a hero—and not just for the Quakers, social reformers, labor organizers, socialists, and peace advocates who have long admired him. He was an extraordinary original, an American for the ages.

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