

Rawlins Lowndes, Speech in the South Carolina House of Representatives, 16 January 1788

Hon. RAWLINS LOWNDES desired gentlemen to consider that his antagonists were mostly gentlemen of the law, who were capable of giving ingenious explanations to such points as they wished to have adopted, He explained his opinion relative to treaties to be, that no treaty concluded contrary to the express laws of the land could be valid. The king of England, when he concluded one, did not think himself warranted to go further than to promise that he would endeavor to induce his Parliament to sanction it. The security of a republic is jealousy; for its ruin may be expected from unsuspecting security. Let us not, therefore, receive this proffered system with implicit confidence, as carrying with it the stamp of superior perfection; rather let us compare what we already possess with what we are offered for it. We are now Under the government of a most excellent constitution, one that had stood the test of time, and carried us through difficulties generally supposed to be insurmountable; one that had raised us high in the eyes of all nations, and given to us the enviable blessings of liberty and independence; a constitution sent like a blessing from Heaven; yet we are impatient to change it for another, that vested power in a few men to pull down that fabric, which we had raised at the expense of our blood. Charters ought to be considered as sacred things. In England, an air erupt was made to alter the charter of the East India Company; but they invoked heaven and earth in their cause; moved lords, nay, even the king, in their behalf, and thus averted the ruin with which they were threatened.

It has been said that this new government was to be considered as an experiment. He really was afraid it would prove a fatal one to our peace and happiness. An experiment! What, risk the loss of political existence on experiment! No, sir; if we are to make experiments, rather let them be such as may do good, but which cannot possibly do any injury to us or our posterity. So far from having any expectation of success from such experiments, he sincerely believed that, when this new Constitution should be adopted, the sun, of the Southern States would set, never to rise again.

To prove this, he observed, that six of the Eastern States formed a majority in the House of Representatives. In the enumeration he passed Rhode Island, and included Pennsylvania. Now, was it consonant with reason, with wisdom, with policy, to suppose, in a legislature where a majority of persons Sat whose interests were greatly different from ours, that we had the smallest chance of receiving adequate advantages? Certainly not. He believed the gentlemen that went from this state, to represent us in Convention, possessed as much integrity, and stood as high in point of character, as any gentlemen that could have been selected; and he also believed that they had done every thing in their power to procure for us a proportionate share in this new government; but the very little they had gained proved what we may expect in future--that the interest of the Northern States would so predominate as to divest us of any pretensions to the title of a republic. In the first place, what cause was there for jealousy of our importing negroes? Why confine us to twenty years, or rather why limit us at all? For his part, he thought this trade could be justified on the principles of religion, humanity, and justice; for certainly to translate a set of human beings from a bad country to a better, was fulfilling every

part of these principles. But they don't like our slaves, because they have none themselves, and therefore want to exclude us from this great advantage. Why should the Southern States allow of this, without the consent of nine states?

...Mr. LOWNDES continued--that we had a law prohibiting the importation of negroes for three years, a law he greatly approved of; but there was no reason offered why the Southern States might not find it necessary to alter their conduct, and open their ports. Without negroes, this state one of the most contemptible in the Union; and he an expression that fell from General Pinckney on a former debate, that whilst there remained one acre of swamp-land in South Carolina, he should raise his voice against restricting the importation of negroes Even in granting the importation for twenty years, care had been taken to make us pay for this indulgence, each negro being liable, on importation, to pay a duty not exceeding ten dollars; and, in addition to this, they were liable to a capitation tax. Negroes were our wealth, our only natural resource; yet behold how our kind friends in the north were determined soon to tie up our hands, and drain us of what we had! The Eastern States drew their means of subsistence, in a great measure, from their shipping; and, on that head, they had been particularly careful not to allow of any burdens: they were not to pay tonnage or duties; no, not even the form of clearing out: all ports were free and open to them! Why, then, call this a reciprocal bargain, which took all from one party, to bestow it on the other!

Jonathan Elliot, ed., *The Debates in the Several State Conventions, on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution*, Vol. 4, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, pp. 271-73.