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Jeremy Belknap to Benjamin Rush, Boston 12 February 1788 (excerpt)

... It gives me great Pleasure to hear of the intended effort of your Society to obtain a Law prohibiting the African Trade. Rhode-Island, bad as they are in some respects, have set us a good Example in *this* Instance, they have by Law prohibited under severe Penalty the buying and selling slaves in foreign Parts & to render Conviction easy the Evidence of one Seaman belonging to the Vessell is sufficient for a Condemnation—

In our late Convention something was said by way of objection to the Constitution because “it *established*” (as the speakers said) “the importation of Slaves for 20 years[.]” Several of the antifederal Party urged this, but none more violently than a certain Quaker Preacher who went so far as to predict that the same measure should be meted to us—i.e[.] that we should lose our Liberties as the Africans lost theirs—He was answered very ably by Mr Parsons who construed that article into a dawn of hope for the final abolition of the horrid Traffick & spoke of it as a great Point gained of the southern states. However the Quaker remained inflexible & as I know him to be a Man of influence in the Circle of *Friends* at the Eastward I suppose he will prejudice the minds of a great Part of that fraternity against the Constitution. The reason of my mentioning this to you is to desire you to inform me whether among the Quakers of Pennslva: any such Construction is put on that article wch respects the Migration or Importation of Foreigners—I think there must be some Men of Sense among them who can-not be so prejudiced, but I wish to be made certain of it & I think I shall be able to make a good use of the Information. . . .

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