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Opposition to the Constitution's Provisions Concerning Slavery

## James Pemberton to John Pemberton Philadelphia, 20 September 1787 (excerpt)

. . . The Expectation of our Politicians has been much turned towards the determination of this Convention, the members of which being under an injunction of Secrecy, their proceedings have been kept very close; how they will now relish the Plan, time will make manifest, but the late Congress had become so very low in general estimation, a Change with enlarged powers, & a proper balance seemed to be absolutely necessary, but yet, unless there is an increase of Virtue among the People, all the efforts of human wisdom, & policy will avail little to promote their real happiness, and welfare—I have given thee these outlines of the new plan of a Fœderal Government, with a view to mention, that we entertained a hope, that it's establishment would have been more conspicuous on the principles of Equity & moral Justice by a Provision against the iniquitous Slave trade, but the influence of the Southern Governmts has diverted them from that very important Object, so far as to obtain a prohibition against the Congress meddling there-with for 21 years, as appears by the ninth Section of the first Article of the Plan—which Says—viz.

“The migration, or importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by Congress prior to the year 1808, but a [tax] or duty may be imposed on such importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each person” which is further defended by a fifth Article, which after liberty given for the mode of proposing future amendments to this intended Constitution, sets forth a Proviso, “that no amendment which may be made prior to the year 1808 shall in any manner affect the first and fourth clauses in the ninth Section of the first Article—” . . .

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