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Opposition to the Constitution's Provisions Concerning Slavery

Samuel Hopkins to Levi Hart Newport, R.I., 29 January 1788 (excerpt)

I received yours of the 12th inst. Yesterday. I thank you for your exertions with regard to the *slave trade*. I should have been glad to be informed, whether what was reported to mr. Brown be true, viz. that they are going into this trade at Middletown and Norwich. I hear they threaten to carry it on here and at Providence yet; but question whether they will do it, as they will expose themselves so much by it.

The new constitution, you observe, guarantees this trade for twenty years. I fear, if it be adopted, this will prove an Achan in our camp. How does it appear in the sight of Heaven, and of all good men, well informed, that *these States*, who have been fighting for liberty, and consider themselves as the highest and most noble example of zeal for it, cannot agree in any political constitution, unless it indulge and authorize them to inslave their fellow men?—I think if this constitution be not adopted, as it is, without any alteration, we shall have none, and shall be in a state of anarchy, and probably of civil war: Therefore, I wish to have it adopted: but still, as I said, *I fear*—And perhaps civil war will not be avoided, if it be adopted. Ah! These unclean spirits, like frogs—They, like the furies of the poets, are spreading discord, and exciting men to contention and war, wherever they go: And they can spoil the best constitution that can be formed. When Congress shall be formed on the new plan, these frogs will be there; for they go forth to *the kings of the earth* in the first place. They will turn the members of that august body into devils, so far as they are permitted to influence them. Have they not already got possession of most of the men who will or can be chosen and appointed to a place in that assembly? I suppose that even good christians, are not out of the reach of influence from these *frogs*. “Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments. . . .” [Revelation 16:13–15]

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