Reactions to the Resumption of the Slave Trade, 1783, 1787

David Ramsay to Benjamin Rush
Charleston, August 22 and September 9, 1783

[August 22] . . . I sincerely regret with you that the Slave trade will be resumed. Had a law been necessary to open this trade I would have opposed it; but, there has never been any debate on the subject. We are now at liberty to trade where we please under that general sanction. This infamous traffic will be resumed without any thing being said on the subject. As to stepping out & volunteering to combat the practice, no good can be expected from that quarter. The Don Quixot who would attempt it would have the consolation of having done his duty to balance the calumny & public odium he would be the subject of without the least prospect of his being able to put a stop to the inhuman traffic. If a law was necessary to legalize the trade, opposition might be made with hope of doing something, but the contrary is contended & it will be resumed without one word being said on the subject by authority.

[September 9] . . . The genius of our people is entirely turned from war to commerce. Schemes of business & partnerships for extending commerce are daily forming. The infamous African trade which you so justly abhor will among other branches of business be renewed. I am informed by a Gentleman lately from Philadelphia that the guilt of this is not confined to one State; for he says that sundry vessels have been lately fitted out in your city on the same business with a view to sell their slaves either in the West Indies or the Southern States. I greatly fear that the mad notions entertained of the separate States sovereignty will forever prevent the interference of the Continental Sovereignty on this subject. I sincerely lament the renewal of this trade, I shall for my own part have no concern with it.

New York Independent Journal, June 2, 1787

What, observes a correspondent, must be the feelings of those unfortunate Americans, when they shall be informed that the very hands from which they so anxiously expect relief, have ever since the peace, been employed in equipping vessels, armed with the instruments of death, and loaded, among their other articles, with the *badges* and *insignias* of slavery, to deprive the poor, unhappy Africans of their liberty? Blush O ye *Bostonians* and *Pennsylvanians** for your degenerate sons, who have thus embarked in this monstrous and abominable trade and traffic! Blush also for yourselves, because you have long beheld this wicked practice, without making the least effort to prevent it. There is no difference between *permitting* it to be done in your harbours and the actual *doing* it yourselves. The equipment of vessels, in your own ports, by your own subjects, for the

open and avowed purpose of enslaving their fellow men, bears ample proof of your sanction and approbation; and the stigma will be fixed on you as a people, not on the individuals who are immediately engaged in the business for pecuniary motives.

> * *It is almost needless to mention, that vessels for the coast of Africa, have been no where fitted out in America, since the treaty of peace, but at the ports of Boston and Philadelphia.*

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