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Luther Martin: Genuine Information VII, Baltimore *Maryland Gazette*, 18 January 1788 (excerpt)

By the *ninth* section of this article, the importation of such persons as any of the States now existing, shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a duty may be imposed on such importation not exceeding ten dollars for each person.

The design of this clause is to prevent the general government from prohibiting the importation of slaves, but the same reasons which caused them to strike out the word "*national*," and not admit the word "*stamps*," influenced them here to guard against the word "*slaves*," they anxiously sought to avoid the admission of expressions which might be odious in the ears of Americans, although they were very willing to admit into their system those *things* which the *expressions* signified: And hence it is, that the clause is so worded, as really to authorise the general government to impose a duty of ten dollars on every foreigner who comes into a State to become a citizen, whether he comes *absolutely free*, or *qualifiedly* so as a servant—although this is contrary to the design of the framers, and the duty was only meant to extend to the importation of *slaves*.

This clause was the subject of a great diversity of sentiment in the convention;—as the system was reported by the committee of detail, the provision was general, that such importation should not be prohibited, without confining it to any particular period.—This was rejected by eight States—Georgia, South-Carolina, and I think North-Carolina voting for it.

We were then told by the delegates of the two first of those States, that their States would never agree to a system which put it in the power of the general government to prevent the importation of slaves, and that they, as delegates from those States, must withhold their assent from such a system.

A committee of one member from each State was chosen by ballot, to take this part of the system under their consideration, and to endeavour to agree upon some report which should reconcile those States;—to this committee also was referred the following proposition, which had been reported by the committee of detail, to wit, "No *navigation* act shall be passed without the assent of *two-thirds* of the members present in each house;" a proposition which the *staple* and *commercial* States were solicitous to *retain*, lest their *commerce* should be placed too much under the power of the *eastern* States, but which these last States were as anxious to *reject*.—This committee, of which also I had the honour to be a member, met and took under their consideration the subjects committed to them; I found the *eastern* States, notwithstanding their *aversion* to *slavery*, were very willing to indulge the southern States, at least with a temporary liberty to prosecute the *slave trade*, provided the southern States would in their turn gratify them, by laying no *restriction on navigation acts*; and after a very little time, the committee, by a great majority, agreed

on a report, by which the general government was to be prohibited from preventing the importation of slaves for a limited time, and the restrictive clause relative to navigation acts was to be omitted.

This report was adopted by a majority of the convention, but not without considerable opposition.—It was said, that we had but just assumed a place among independent nations, in consequence of our opposition to the attempts of Great-Britain to *enslave us*—that this opposition was grounded upon the preservation of *those rights*, to which God and Nature had entitled *us*, not in *particular*, but in *common* with *all the rest of mankind*—That we had *appealed* to the *Supreme Being* for his *assistance*, as the *God of freedom*, who could not but *approve* our efforts to preserve the *rights* which he had thus *imparted to his creatures*—that now, when we scarcely had risen from our *knees*, from *supplicating* his *aid* and *protection*—in *forming our government* over a *free people*, a government formed pretendedly on the *principles* of *liberty* and for *its preservation*,—in *that government* to have a provision, not only putting it out of *its power* to *restrain* and *prevent* the *slave trade*, but *even encouraging that most infamous traffic*, by giving the *States power* and *influence* in the *union*, in *proportion* as they *cruelly and wantonly sport with the rights of their fellow creatures*, ought to be considered as a *solemn mockery of*, and *insult to*, that *God* whose protection we had then implored, and could not fail to hold us up in *detestation*, and render us *contemptible* to every *true friend* of liberty in the world.—It was said, it ought to be considered that *national crimes can only be*, and *frequently are*, *punished* in this world by *national punishments*, and that the *continuance* of the slave trade, and thus giving it a *national sanction* and *encouragement*, ought to be considered as *justly exposing* us to the *displeasure* and *vengeance* of *Him*, who is equal Lord of all, and who views with equal eye, the poor *African slave* and his *American master!*

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