



# CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

csac.history.wisc.edu > Document Collections > The Founding Period and Slavery > The Southern States Debate Slavery and the Constitution > Debates Over the Foreign Slave Trade

## REPUBLICUS *Kentucke Gazette*, March 1, 1788

This leads me to Art. I Sect. 9. “The migration or importation of such persons, as any of the States now existing, shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year 1808; (twenty years hence) but a tax, or duty may be imposed on such importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each person.” An excellent clause this, in an Algerine constitution; but not so well calculated (I hope) for the latitude of America. It is not to be disguised that by “such persons,” slaves are principally, if not wholly intended: and shall this be found among the principles of a free people, and making a radical part of the grand base, on which they would erect an edifice sacred to liberty. “Tell it not in Gath!” O that no envious surge might ever roll it to the eastern side of the atlantic! Unhappy africans! what have they done? Have they murdered our citizens or burnt our settlements? Have they butchered, scalped, and exhausted every device of torture, on our defenceless women, and innocent children; as the savage mescriants of our own country have done? No, no! Then, why deprive them of the greatest of all blessings, liberty, “without which,” says Dr. Price “man is a beast, and life a curse”; while coward-like, we court, caress, and cringe to our murderers. Ignorant, and comparatively innocent, till we taught them the diabolical arts of destruction, captivity, and death; and provided them with the infernal means of carrying them into practice; and all this to furnish ourselves with slaves, at the guilty expence oftines, of the blood of, ten times the number of those thus enslaved, who lost their lives in the gallant, the virtuous defence of themselves, and families. Has this guilt ever been attoned? and do we boast of being advocates for liberty? shocking absurdity! More absurd still than a licence for such an execrable trade, should be radically woven into, and become an essential part of our national constitution, a constitution formed by a chosen assembly of our most eminent and respectable citizens; and where a personage presided, second to no individual of the human family.

The boast of America.—The wonder of Europe.—

O liberty! O virtue! O my country.

Tell us, ye who can thus, coolly, reduce the impious principle of slavery, to a constitutional system: ye professed violators of liberties of mankind: where will ye stop? what security can you give, that, when there shall remain no more black people, ye will not enslave others, white as yourselves? when Africa is exhausted, will ye spare America? and is not twenty years (taking into the accompt the slain with the more unhappy captives, victims to perpetual slavery) sufficient to depopulate her inmost forests? Or is this only an ill boding prelude, sounded in the ears, and designedly introductory to the fate of these (yet unhappy) states, who gave you existence; and who even now, while you are thus ungratefully soaring toward the summit of *Aristocracy*, are honouring you with their confidence? I shudder at the catastrophe? awake my fellow citizens! and let this

infamous clause, together with the principle which gave it birth, be not only expunged out of your constitution: but contemned, eradicated, torn from your heart forever.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski, ed., *A Necessary Evil?*, Constitutional Heritage Series, Vol. II (Madison House, Madison, Wis. 1995), 179–80.