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From George Nicholas, Charlottesville, 16 February 1788 (excerpt)

. . . The next objection is that if this government is adopted the property that we have in slaves may be lost or injured So far is this from being true that we can venture to say that the new government will be the best security that we can have for retaining that property. Congress could pass no act which would injure that property but in one of three ways either

1st. by passing an act of emancipation: or

2dly. by permitting the other states to harbour the fugitives

or 3dly. by imposing such taxes on them as would oblige the owners to discharge them.

They could not pass an act for their emancipation because both Congress and the different state legislatures are forbid to pass *ex post facto* laws and therefore if the new government should take place neither Congress or a state legislature could pass an act to deprive any man or set of men of property which they hold under the general laws of the land. ~~And therefore~~ if this government had taken place prior to the last session of our assembly they could not have passed a law for the emancipation of Robt. Mooreman's Negroes. Neither could Congress secondly injure you by permitting them to be harboured and protected in the other states for by an express clause in the constitution all slaves escaping from one state into another shall be delivered up. Nor could they in the third instance injure you by the mode of imposing the taxes. A poll tax is the only tax they could impose which could affect our slaves and the constitution is so guarded in that respect that we can receive no injury by that means. It is expressly declared that no capitation or poll tax shall be imposed except in proportion to the enumeration therein directed which is that we should be charged with only three fifths of the number of our slaves. It never could be the interest therefore of the states which have no slaves to impose a poll tax. Because in case of a poll tax if Massachusetts had one thousand white inhabitants, and Virginia also one thousand inhabitants but one half of them white and the other half black; Massachusetts would be obliged to pay Congress for her whole number whereas Virginia would pay for only eight hundred. Thus by this constitution this part of our property is much better secured and the possessors of it less liable to oppressive taxes than even under our state government.

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