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Debates in the Hillsborough Convention, 24 July 1788 (excerpts)

(The first three clauses of the second section read.) . . .

Mr. [William] *Goudy*: This clause of taxation will give an advantage to some states over the others. It will be oppressive to the southern states. Taxes are equal to our representation. To augment our taxes and encrease our burthens, our negroes are to be represented. If a state has fifty thousand negroes, she is to send one Representative for them. I wish not to be represented with negroes, especially if it encreases my burthens.

Mr. [William R.] *Davie*: I will endeavour to obviate what the gentleman last up has said. I wonder to see gentlemen so precipitate and hasty on a subject of such awful importance. It ought to be considered, that *some of us* are slow of apprehension, not having those quick conceptions, and luminous understandings, of which other gentlemen may be possessed. The gentleman “does not wish to be represented with negroes.” This, Sir, is an unhappy species of population, but we cannot at present alter their situation. The eastern states had great jealousies on this subject: They insisted that their cows and horses were equally entitled to representation; that the one was property as well as the other. It became our duty on the other hand, to acquire as much weight as possible in the legislation of the union; and as the northern states were more populous in whites, this only could be done by insisting that a certain proportion of our slaves should make a part of the computed population. It was attempted to form a rule of representation from a compound ratio of wealth and population; but on consideration it was found impracticable to determine the comparative value of lands, and other property, in so extensive a territory, with any degree of accuracy; and population alone was adopted as the only practicable rule or criterion of representation. It was urged by the Deputies of the eastern states, that a representation of two-fifths would be of little utility, and that their entire representation would be unequal and burthensome: That in a time of war slaves rendered a country more vulnerable, while its defence devolved upon its *free* inhabitants. On the other hand, we insisted that in time of peace, they contributed by their labour to the general wealth as well as other members of the community: That as rational beings they had a right of representation, and in some instances might be highly useful in war. On these principles the eastern states gave the matter up, and consented to the regulation as it has been read. I hope these reasons will appear satisfactory. It is the same rule or principle which was proposed some years ago by Congress, and assented to by twelve of the states. It may wound the delicacy of the gentleman from Guilford (Mr. Goudy) but I hope he will endeavour to accommodate his feelings to the interest and circumstances of his country.

Mr. [James] *Galloway* said, that he did not object to the representation of negroes, so much as he did to the fewness of the number of Representatives. He was surprised how we came to have but five, including those intended to represent negroes: That in his humble opinion North-Carolina was entitled to that number independent of the negroes.

Mr. [Richard Dobbs] *Spaight* endeavoured to satisfy him, that the Convention had no rule to go by in this case: That they could not proceed upon the ratio mentioned in the Constitution, till the enumeration of the people was made: That some states had made a return to Congress of their numbers, and others had not: That it was mentioned that we had had time, but made no return: That the present number was only temporary: That in three years the actual census would be taken, and our number of Representatives regulated accordingly. . . .

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