End of U.S. Slave Importation, 1808 - I

Lead: The founders thought they had a solution to the problem of slavery in the new United States. They thought it would make the thing go away. In this they were wrong.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: One of the important debates at the Constitutional Convention that met in Philadelphia in 1787 was over the question of slavery. Though the delegates were cautious men of property, anxious to preserve the prerogatives of wealth

and status, many were disturbed about the institution of slavery. It was seen to do violence to the egalitarian principles on which the American Revolution had been fought, detrimental to the character of slave and slave-holder alike, a social and practical danger to society as a whole, and was at that time correctly thought to be economically inefficient.

Colonel George Mason of Virginia spoke for the slave skeptics when he called the slave trade an infernal traffic maintained in the colonies by a greedy British establishment before the war and continued as moral corruption after the war. He worried that slaves could become pawns in the hands of invading powers and was

convinced that every slave-holder was born a petty tyrant who as a class were willing to bring the judgment of heaven down on the country for dubious economic gain. Virginia and Maryland, he said, had already ended the importation of slaves and the new Constitution should allow the General government to restrict the increase of slavery.

In response, Deep South delegates such as Rutledge and Pinkney warned that their state would not ratify the document if any restrictions on slavery were enacted. Many Southerners felt that slavery was on the wane and would eventually disappear. Next time: the fruitless compromise.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

<u>Resources</u>

Rawley, James A. *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*. New York, NY: Norton, 1981.

Weld, Theodore Dwight. *Slavery and the Internal Slave Trade in the United States*. New York, NY: Arno Press, 1969.

White, John M.A. *Slavery in the American South*. New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1971.