

Lesson 10, Worksheet 2

Voices from the 1821 New York Constitutional Convention

[Blacks] are a peculiar people, incapable, in my judgment, of exercising that privilege with any sort of discretion, prudence, or independence. They have no just conceptions of civil liberty. They know not how to appreciate it and are consequently indifferent to its preservation.

- Delegate John Ross,
Genesee County

[I]t was said that the right of suffrage would elevate them. He would ask whether it would elevate a monkey or a baboon to allow them to vote. No, it would be to sport, and trifle, and insult them, to say that they might be candidates for the office of president of the United States.

- Delegate Olney Briggs,
Schoharie County

Are they not taxable, and do not many of them pay their proportion of taxes in common with white citizens? ... Do we not daily see them working side by side with white citizens on our farms, and on our public highways? ... How then can that distinction justify us in taking from them any of the common rights which every other free citizen enjoys?

- Delegate Abraham Van Vechten,
Albany County

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Why, sir, are these men to be excluded from rights which they possess in common with their countrymen? ... Why are they, who were born as free as ourselves, natives of the same country...now to be deprived of all those rights, and doomed to remain forever as aliens among us.

- Delegate Peter Jay,
Westchester County

[L]ook at that people, and ask your consciences if they are competent to vote. Ask yourselves honestly, whether they have intelligence to discern, or purity of principle to exercise, with safety, that important right.

- Delegate Peter R. Livingston,
Dutchess County

The minds of the blacks are not competent to vote. They are too much degraded to estimate the value, or exercise with fidelity and discretion that important right. It would be unsafe in their hands.

- Delegate Samuel Young,
Saratoga County