

89. Samuel S. Cox Condemns Emancipation (1862)

Source: *Congressional Globe, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, Appendix*, pp. 242–49.

The abolition of slavery seems so inevitable a result of the American Civil War that it is difficult to realize how much controversy it aroused at the time, in both the Union and the Confederacy. In 1862, as the Lincoln administration slowly moved toward ending slavery, most northern Democrats expressed bitter opposition. Some of their arguments are illustrated in this June speech in Congress by Samuel S. Cox of Ohio. Cox supported the war effort but insisted that its goal must be the restoration of the Union “as it was”—that is, with slavery intact. Cox marshaled many arguments against emancipation, including the claims that it would disrupt the nation’s economy, violate the Constitution, and alienate many white soldiers. He also invoked racist fears of an influx into the North of emancipated slaves who, he claimed, would lower wages by competing with white laborers and become a drain on public resources. Cox’s speech was circulated as a campaign document in the congressional elections of 1862 when, partly because of fear of the consequences of emancipation, Democrats made strong gains in the northern states.

THERE IS SOMETHING needed in making successful civil war besides raising money and armies. You must keep the confidence and spirit of the people. It must not only be animated by a noble passion at the outset, but it must be sustained by confidence in the cause. . . . Is there a member here who dare say that Ohio troops will fight successfully or fight at all, if the result shall be the flight and movement of the black race by millions northward to their own State? . . .

Is it the policy here, as it would seem to be, . . . to [convert] the war into a St. Domingo-insurrection, turning the South into one utter desolation? . . . We want no more poetry about striking off chains and bidding the oppressed go. Plain people want to know whether the chains will not be put upon white limbs, and *whither* the oppressed

are to go. If the industry of the North is to be fettered with their support; if they are to go to Ohio and the North, we want to know it. Nay, we want, if we can, to stop it. . . .

Slavery may be an evil, it may be wrong for southern men to use unpaid labor, but what will be the condition of the people of Ohio when the free jubilee shall have come in its ripe and rotten maturity? If slavery is bad, the condition of the State of Ohio, with an unrestrained black population . . . will be far worse. . . . The free negroes will become equal, or will continue unequal to the whites. Equality is a condition which is self-protective, wanting nothing, asking nothing, able to take care of itself. It is an absurdity to say that two races as dissimilar as black and white, of different origin, of unequal capacity, can succeed in the same society when placed in competition. There is no such example in history of the success of two separate races under such circumstances. . . .

Prejudice, stronger than all principles, though not always stronger than lust, has imperatively separated the whites from the blacks. In the school-house, the church, or the hospital, the black man must not seat himself beside the white; even in death and at the cemetery the line of distinction is drawn. To abolish slavery the North must go still further and forget that fatal prejudice of race which governs it, and which makes emancipation so illusory. To give men their liberty, to open to them the gates of the city, and then say, “there, you shall live among yourself, you shall marry among yourselves, you shall form a separate society in society,” is to create a cursed caste, and replace slaves by pariahs.

Questions

1. Why does Cox feel that emancipating slaves endangers the liberties of white northerners?
 2. What status does he anticipate for the slaves if they are freed?
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