

Abortion and Slavery

One can't help but wonder if the advocates of "abortion rights" realize how eerie the parallels are between their arguments and those made a hundred and fifty years ago by the advocates of "slavery rights." Consider:

(1) Those who supported the right to own slaves said emphatically that they were not pro-slavery, they were pro-choice. They admitted that slavery was not a good thing and agreed that the country ought to work toward eliminating the need for it. Nevertheless, they believed that — in situations where slavery might be "necessary" — people ought to be allowed to make their own personal choice. They said that those conscientiously opposed to slavery should simply refrain from practicing it themselves, and leave other people free to make a different choice.

(2) Those who supported the right to own slaves said they believed this was not a matter for the federal government to decide. Much was said about federal violations of individual "privacy," the "intrusion" of the government into personal matters, etc. It was argued that bureaucrats in Washington should not interfere with intensely personal decisions such as whether to own slaves. Such private matters just weren't any of the federal government's business.

(3) Those who supported the right to own slaves questioned whether those against slavery would be willing to help feed, clothe, and employ the many slaves who would be in need if they were free. They said that as undesirable as slavery might be in theory, it was preferable to the miserable life many blacks would have to lead if they were pushed out on their own into a world where nobody wanted them.

(4) Those who supported the right to own slaves argued that those who believed slavery was immoral should not be allowed to "impose" their personal morals on the entire nation. It was maintained that, if slavery was a moral issue, the government should not try to legislate morality.

(5) Those who supported the right to own slaves did so in many cases because, at heart, they did not really consider blacks to be persons. They believed it was not meaningful to discuss the "rights" of beings who were not "human" in the full sense of the term.

Can anybody not see the parallels between these fallacious arguments and those used today to support abortion rights? Not surprisingly, of course, abortion rights advocates reject the analogy between abortion and slavery. New York Times columnist Tom Wicker, for example, once wrote:

“To choose to own a slave . . . indisputably damages the legal . . . rights of others. For a woman to choose an abortion does not indisputably damage other people’s rights — unless, of course, one believes that life indisputably begins at conception.”

Such a comment not only begs the question, it overlooks a critical point. The fact that blacks are persons may be indisputable now. But it so happens that our national policy on slavery was set long ago, at a time when the person hood of blacks was as widely debated as the person hood of a fetus is today. We consider Abraham Lincoln a hero for emancipating the slaves long before a national consensus was reached on the person hood of blacks. The courage to do what was objectively right was the essence of Lincoln’s great character. He did not govern by opinion poll or limit himself to the truths that were “indisputable” in his day.

How unlike Lincoln are many of our leaders today! In bondage as they are to the “indisputable” truths of public opinion, we wonder what modern abortionists would have done in Lincoln’s day. Before using the federal government to free the slaves, would they have waited a hundred and fifty years until everybody agreed that the person hood of blacks was “indisputable”? We should be glad that a century and a half ago there were those courageous enough to defend what was right with respect to black people, long before the thing that was right was universally acknowledged. And what is more, we should hope that the next century and a half will vindicate the judgment of those who today risk public disfavor by calling on the government to protect the rights of unborn children. Sad to say, the “right to life” principle may be an idea whose time has not yet come. But that doesn’t change the right and wrong of the matter by one iota.

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