



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

csac.history.wisc.edu > Document Collections > The Founding Period and Slavery > Slavery in the New Nation > The Role of the Issue of Abolitionism in the New York Gubernatorial Election of 1792

Peter van Schaack To John C. Wynkoop, Kinderhook, March 13, 1792

I have received your favor and leaving the matters of Business to take their fate I proceed to the more important subject of Politics, trusting that however prudence may induce you to passivity of conduct, your mind has not so far lost its natural vivacity as to be under the Influence of a Stoical apathy at the present momentous crisis. I own to you that I have not felt myself so warmly Interested in the Event of any former Election as I now do in that of the approaching one as it respects the first Magistrate of the State. My Zeal is the more excited by the detestable Calumnies which with the Venerable Character of Mr. Jay is assail'd, and whilst sycophants and Dependants are imposing upon Credulity and folly to obstruct the Honor & Interest of the Community, it is difficult to remain an unconcerned Spectator. The manumission business is here as with you made an Engine of to tarnish the Illustrious Character of Mr. Jay; but I trust its pernicious effect will in a great measure be defeated. People are already coming to their senses and feel the Impropriety of opposing a man so unexceptionable upon grounds so Questionable at least, if not wicked. They consider that if it *should really* be true that they have not an absolute right to convert a part of God's rational Creatures into Brutes, It would add to the Iniquity of the Practice if they were to oppose a man who holds a doctrine so full of Philanthropy even if it should in this Instance be misapplied. Such as opposed Great Britain lest the Consequence however remote of a present submission should be the loss of Liberty to their Posterity, begin to doubt how far it is consistent in them to maintain in Hereditary Bondage a part of their fellow creatures and they feel the force of the Divine command whatever "ye would that men should do unto you even so do ye unto them." Some indeed there are whose avarice induces them to deny "that these Creatures so black & with such flat Noses are a Part of the Human Species and these I suppose will by and by trace up their Origin to a different source from that of our first Parents in Paradise or prove that Noah would not admit such Wretches into the Ark. Minds like these will easily be brought to conclude that the poor black wretches are not contemplated by the Supreme Being in the Decalogue and particularly that it would be no transgression of the Sixth Commandment to destroy one of them any more than to slaughter a Bullock. I really do not see how these consequences can be avoided by those who maintain the legitimacy of Slavery. One would imagine that the present tragical scenes in the West Indies would bear an awfull admonition to people of this cast, scenes which by the by have been predicted long since by those who have opposed this horrid practice. Ardit Electagee. I wish this may not prove a presage to our southern neighbours—It is to be imputed to the laudable exertions of the Quakers that something like this does not also threaten *us*.

To me it appears evident that the ground of the present Opposition to Mr. Jay will defeat the purpose of those who make it by bringing about more speedily perhaps than it would otherwise have happened the very Event they deprecate. Reformation is generally the consequence of a bigotted maintenance of false tenets whether in Religion or Morality. I do not precisely know what part Mr. Jay has acted in this business. As to the Injustice of Slavery, I presume that none among you is so hardened as to deny it; as to the Inexpediency of a general Manumission some worthy Characters among us maintain it with some force of argument; but I do not find any who do not Contemplate a gradual Manumission as a desirable object. I hope the County of Ulster and especially the Ancient town of Kingston is not less enlightened or less liberal than the little Village of Kinderhook; and that the Whigs will not have to receive lessons of Liberty from The Tories. But this would not be the only paradox arising out of this subject for while Slavery can have no Existence in the *Venal and corrupt* Island of Great Britain, it is cherished and advocated in the free country of America: thus while the Americans invite the slavish Europeans to quit their native Country and repose in the sunshine of Liberty here; the unfortunate Africans have to fly from this free country to regain their Liberty in England where a free born American cannot so much as breathe. Is there not something monstrously selfish in this kind of Liberty and is it what was pretended as the spirit of resistance and which being believed to Exist as it was pretended procured so many Friends in every Part of the Globe to the American Cause? By the by has Mr. Jay's competitor ever disclosed his sentiments upon this Question? surely it is of Importance enough to merit his animadversion if wrong; and if in his opinion right it would be more heroick tho' to his own disadvantage to assent to the truth, than to rest under the Veil of concealment & mystery seeking Preferment from the possessors of slaves. If Governor C. has ever declared himself it is unknown to me and therefore if I injure him it is unintentional. How is Mr. Addison affected? I should hope that the Sons of Science and the Friends of the liberal Arts will be pretty much United and will be a more honorable tho' perhaps not more numerous Band than the Masters of Negroes, Mulattos and Mestees.

I do indeed hear that it is attempted with these Masters to Coalesce the Reverend Clergy on pretence that Mr. Jay had Occasion'd a certain clause in the CONSTITUTION; but I trust that this pious Body of men will consider the seeming disqualification as a Real and substantial privilege and not forget that they are the servants of him whose "Kingdom was not of this World. . . ."

I was much pleas'd to hear of a Letter from Major [Peter Van] Gaasbeck to some Gentlemen at Albany wherein he declared himself personally for Mr. Jay altho' he apprehended the Manumission Business would be an Insuperable bar. I trust this dark Cloud will vanish and that the rays of truth will shine in spite of it. But if it should not I shall at least rejoice that I have acted in Concert with so many Respectable Characters as support Mr. Jay.