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John Jay To John C. Dongan, New York, February 27, 1792

As to my sentiments and conduct relative to the abolition of slavery, the fact is this:—In my opinion, every man of every color and description has a natural right to freedom, and I shall ever acknowledge myself to be an advocate for the manumission of slaves in such way as may be consistent with the justice due to them, with the justice due to their master, and with the regard due to the actual state of society. These considerations unite in convincing me that the abolition of slavery must necessarily be gradual.

On being honored with the commission I now hold [chief justice of the United States], I retired from the [New York Abolition] Society to which you allude, and of which I was President, it appearing to me improper for a judge to be a member of such associations. That Society I fear has been misrepresented, for instead of censure they merit applause. To promote by virtuous means the extension of the blessings of liberty, to protect a poor and friendless race of men, their wives and children from the snares and violence of men-stealers, to provide instruction for children who were destitute of the means of education, and who, instead of pernicious, will now become useful members of society—are certainly objects and cares of which no man ought to be censured; and these are the objects and the cares of that benevolent society.

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