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Title: Letter from Alexander H. Stephens to Thomas W. Thomas

Date: June 16, 1856

Location: I-SpahrB-1959-10

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Washington DC
16 June 1856

Dear Thomas W. Thomas

My dear Sir
Yours

Letter of the 11th Inst has just reached me - I lay no means concur with you in the opinion that Buchanan as a matter of course will be elected - I look upon the approaching contest as one of great heat & fierce rivalry is the result free from doubt - On the most probable result however I can not yet venture even a speculation satisfactory to myself - I can't see what the present fusion movement at Philadelphia will accomplish - Nor do I concur with you at all as to the reason why Mr. Pierce was not nominated -

It was not because he "shot down
the abolition traitors in Kansas"
but rather because he "~~shot~~
down" all the true friends of the
Kansas Bill in the Northern
States two years ago - Not with
gun powder it is true but
with executive patronage by
putting their enemies in power
over their necks & heads - Many
of our best friends at the North
were hostile to Pierce - and to my
knowledge they had reason to
be - It is only within the last
six months that the position of
Mr. Pierce has been such as to
warrant my commendation - I
mean the position of his admini-
stration - That ~~there has~~ been a
change in his policy I have no

doubt - when he sent Sumner & Kansas
his design is that of his cabinet &
are ~~clearly~~ ~~of a~~ ~~specimen~~ ~~was~~ ~~to~~ ~~make~~
Kansas a free state - The reason
the change in that policy took place
I will not now throw ~~overboard~~ into -
Perhaps ^{to some} from the same motive
which "caused Meade and his attacking
Councils to change their tactics on
the original proposition when it
was first introduced into the Senate -
~~It~~ may have been discovered that
the question was strong enough
to override "pungy opposition" -
But his conduct towards those
men who stood in the front of
the fight could not be forgotten
by them hardly because at the last
hour he seemed despond to resist
the tide that he could no longer stay
back & he come upon its bosom again
with power - I am now straggling of

the various motives on the part of
those Southern men in the Convention
who were opposed to his nomination
And while I would have voted for
him if he had been the choice of
the Convention upon the grounds
that he is now right or has been
lately I am far to condemn & you
as you already know he was no
favorite of mine - And he is
one of the last men in this country
I would read a bulletin for -
I believe most of the difficulties we
now have in Kansas, Kansas
from the field hands, weaklings, folly
and vacillation of his policy in regard
to that Territory - Mr. Buchanan is not
responsible for his nomination or any
abolition or free soil or Anti Slavery
policy on the part of any of the members
of the Cincinnati Convention - The
truth is there were no such members
there - But I could give instances of

man in that Convention - was a
 student of Kansas - who was a great
 Purse because of his course towards
 the "true Kansas men" at the period
 that "true men's work" on that question
 But I need not show you how -
 The fact is as I state it - And you
 will find that there will be but
 few men at the North of Missouri
 for soil productivity who vote for
 Buchanan - Some may but it will
 be those only who have a will
 make up their minds to abandon
 their basis and for the future
 stand with the party upon the
status of existing legislation -
 My word for it you need have no
 apprehensions for the welfare of
 America if Buchanan should be elected -
 All men who vote today such results

or who have a desire to produce ^{it} and
fall into the gulf of slavery of
Black Republicanism which now
seriously threatens to sweep the
entire North - If I could today
be assured of carrying the whole
South 120 votes and Penn. & New York
I would be willing to Coupt - I
am however not without hopes
of carrying several other Northern
States to wit Illinois, Iowa, Califor-
nia, Connecticut & perhaps New
Hampshire & Maine - And may
be Indiana also - But the
Colisee in all these states will
be the hottest ever waged in
politics, and just as deadly
on the air as if Pierce had
been the ~~President~~ - That four

Burhannans declaration, which I have
heard of that he would have voted for
the Bill if he had been in Congress
- a part from his public speech
in response to the Resolutions of the
Penn. Democratic Convention affirming
that the Kansas Bill was not an
act of "un necessary legislation" but
an act of Justice & equity - which
Resolutions he approved - a part
I say from these considerations
we have fully & cordially endorsed
the Cincinnati Platform which
fully identifies him with it and
upon it we with all of us
must stand or fall as the
people in the contest may
decide - for in his case at all
analogous to that of General Scott in
1852 - The Whig Platform of that year

it is true was sound enough upon
the Slavery question - It was satisfactory
to me for I drew it - ^{or helped to draw it} - But General
Scott would not express his approv-
al of it - He took the nomination
with the Resolutions annexed -
And it is well known that General
took any position against Scott
could be imputed to endorse or
approve the Platform - Indeed
after the nomination I stated
to friends of his that I would
vote for him if he would in his
letter of acceptance give his approval
to it - This he declined to do - and
so far from it distinctly stated
in his letter that he would not
make those principles the policy of
his administration so far as the
conducting of patronage was concerned -

It was when this letter of acceptance
 made its appearance that I for the
 first time determined my determination
 not to support him - Up to that time
 I had not committed myself against
 his support - I expressly refused
 to do so in conversation
 with Mr. Dawson and others just
 before they went to the Convention -
 though Dawson ^{and} ~~these~~ other Fellows
 were men open & positive in their
 declarations that they would
 not vote for Scott if nominated -
 Dawson said if Scott should be
 nominated then could not be
 an electoral ticket got up in
 regard for him - I told Dawson
 if Seward were nominated an
 electoral ticket would be seen

in Georgia for him - That if the ^{con-}vention
would put forth a sound
and National Platform such
as that which was adopted and
which I alluded to and ~~which~~
Abner Scott and if
he would plant himself
upon it though I was very
much opposed to his being
the candidate on it but
nevertheless I would vote for
him - Then on party - The
Platform was adopted - Scott
was nominated - He refused
to give the Platform his approval
and I opposed his election while
Mr. Dawson ~~was~~ for him - Now
in the present case I have seen

Nothing from Mr. Buchanan tending
to show that he was not in sentiment
with us in the original Kansas
Movement - I know many of the
warmest friends of his nomination
were also the staunchest friends we
had in that fight - I know
he has publicly endorsed the
declaration that the Union may
not be necessary at - and above
all I know that he is now wholly
and fully committed to the policy
of the Union not only in the past
but in the future and I also know
that the great body of the ^{enemies} ~~opponents~~
of that Union both North and
South will make the most
valuable efforts in their power to
defeat him and manly to cause of his

present then and avowed counter-
part in the case of Scott the great
mass of those of the North who
saw him and whom by choice
would have ~~ended~~ ^{more} ~~ended~~ a
Gibson into power chief ~~beneficial~~
the platform upon which he was
nominated - So much for this
discussion - which I hope you
will of course estimate as you think
"I had not" half so strong a case
for going against Scott as I have
for making a rebellion ~~in~~ ~~against~~
Buchanan in favour of Pierce
or Douglas - Now I assure you
again I look solely in all these
questions to principles and not to
men - at least I look more to
principles than I do to men - Douglas
was my choice and if for either
of them men I could have ~~been~~ been

indeed to head a rebellion, it would
 have been for him - But in this
 case duty does not point that way
 as I feel the justice of its sense -
 On the contrary I feel in the
 matter very much as Douglas
 expresses his own feelings on the
 subject - And here I will remark
 that I feel fully assured and
 fully sure that you are mistaken
 in supposing that Douglas
 was not nominated because he
 backed Pierce - I know the
 most influential men from the
 North in that Convention who
 favoured Buchanan's nomination
 were just as true and sound as
 Douglas himself - I have been
 with them in council in the darkest

hours which ever sustained our
cause - Their profusion for Buchanan
grew out of no opposition to
Douglass' position or principle -
from no desire to yield
an iota to the Anti-Slavery
policy - but from a personal
preference - and from the
fact that Douglass' writing
in the Proponent four
years ago depicted Buchanan
and caused Pierce an outraged
to be taken up and whose
whole policy since lately
has been to strike down
National men north and
south - This is the reason for
their profusion and it is not
only a natural one and
a legitimate one but an excusable

one in my Opinion - These are my views
given to you as fully and frankly
as you gave yours to me - I am
on the ground and speak of things
I know - And as I understand
the details of duty in the almost
death struggle before us on the
part of the friends of the
Union under the Constitution
as it is and ought to be maintained
on one side and the other and
around enemies of both on the
other side they prompt me
strongly not only not to oppose
but to sustain and thus cripple the
efforts of the partisans throughout
the land but to give them
my cordial and warm coopera-
tion - Whether this course will

In the beginning at the end
of my political career, & a
question of but little weight
with me - If the Country
can be saved by a revision
of its friends, who make
common cause & persevere
it on the only bases on which
it ought to be preserved I
shall be content whatever
fortune may befall myself -
You & just a sympathy for
those true National Consti-
tution abiding men at the
North who have been cut
down for their maintenance
of the right in days past -
I feel the same - But you
must allow me to say to you that
none of them fell under the hands

of Pierce and his administration
 than by any other means - These
 are the men who were the
 most anxious for Buchannans
 nomination - Some of them
 I know and the cause of
 their grievances I also know -
 And it was "natural" as you
 say for them to look to some
 other quarter for a leader than
 the hand that snote them -
 I know it has been said that
 Buchannans friends were looking
 to you for support - This I will
 give candidly from an observation
 on the ground in my opinion
 is a misrepresentation - Those who
 men desirous of the nomination of

Piecer favored such rumors -
I could never find any real
friend of Buchanan that ever
put forth such an argument.
I was very anxious that the
contest between the several
candidates for the nomination
should not descend to such
a system of warfare - I
am well satisfied that it
was not founded in truth
and Justice - Buchanan's
antecedents were also brought
up - his opinions on Slavery
expressed in his Texas speech
is now upon all these points
I have acted upon the principle
of letting their antecedents

before 1850 be forgotten - On this principle
only could I have supported Webster
or Fillmore in 1852 - And even ^{since} after
the passage of the Kansas Bill in
1854 ~~have~~ ^{have not} I been desirous to
make opposition of that measure
a test for perpetual exclusion -
I am willing to affiliate now
with all who from this
time hence forth will make
the principle of that Bill in our
domestic policy the basis of
legislation - Those who understand
only agree to let that Bill
be understood and embodied upon the
Statute Book but who will
in future apply the same
principles in all analogous cases -
The great result of getting this

policy sustained and established
by our Government is the about
which I am cooking -
If in Georgia there should be
a union of parties, as you
anticipate in support of Buchanan
I should be rejoiced - But you
or I certainly do not understand
the position of the leaders of
the Georgia R. A. if you suppose
their position is the same as
that of Buchanan - In their
Platform in Philadelphia in Feb. last
which Mr. Fillmore has
endorsed the taking off of
the Missouri restriction is one
of the grand offences brought
against this Administration -
That all Buchanan approve -
But Mr. Fillmore and any of his Georgia

traders have ever signified any
 disposition to make the principle
 of the Kansas Bill as to Slavery
 the basis of future legislation
 in the creation & formation
 of territorial governments - To
 this policy Mr. Buchanan and
 the whole party - every man
 that nominated him is fully
 committed - To get the whole
 country - all parties in Europe
 and every where else brought
 to the same commitment &
 acknowledgment is the
 great object of my application -
 This what I wish above all
 things to see accomplished -
 If John Van Buren for instance

shall take down what he has
said and give in his address
to sound and right doctrine
even at the eleventh hour
I would not close the door
against him - The triumph of
the truth is what I wish to
see and on this point I
can say with earnestness
and zeal to all who have
hitherto fought us -

"While the camp holds out to them"

"The vessel sooner may return" -

I am not looking to the success
of men men a parties - I
am looking solely to the success
of principle - And I do verily
believe it in the approaching

Contest we shall succeed there
will never be another sectional
or slavery struggle in the central
States, at least in our day -
In the first term in the history
of the Country has the great
issue been presented - A right
Platform presented by a mani-
fested party with a candidate
standing squarely upon the
simple, ancient and new
before submitted to the American
people - Upon the result of the
issue the fate of the Country
may depend - I shall not now
anticipate ^{or what may happen in case of defeat -} long
longevity - I
have a strong attachment for
the Union as it was made and
~~to hold~~ ^{long} as it may be maintained and

The Constitution - I have strong
faith in its being thus preserved -
But now is the time when it is
to be put to the trying test - My
utmost efforts will be made
on the side of those who look
with the same object and
hope that I do to the future -
But I must stop - I can say no
more now - I have written vastly
more than I had any idea of
writing when I took up my
pen - My fingers are tired out -
I fear you can not decipher what
is already written or rather scribbled -
I have given you however my own
word that freedom and frankness
which I thought was due no
less to you than myself -

Yours most respectfully
Hon. Thos. W. Thomas Alexander Stephens
Athens Ga

Washington, D.C.
16 June, 1856

Hon Thomas W. Thomas

My Dear Sir

Your letter of the 11th just has reached me. I by no means concur with you in the opinion that Buchanan as a matter of course will be elected. I look upon the approaching contest as one of great heat and fierceness nor is the result free from doubt. On the most probable result however I can not yet venture or speculation satisfactory to myself until I see what the present fusion movements at Philadelphia will accomplish. Nor do I concur with you at all as to the reasons why Mr. Pierce was not nominated. It was not because he "shot down the abolition traitors in Kansas" but rather because he "shot down" all the true friends of the Kansas bill in the northern states two years ago - not with gun powder it is true but with executive patronage by putting their enemies in power over their ^{cks &} ^{ds.} Many of our best friends at the North were hostile to Pierce - and to my knowledge they had reason to be. It is only within the last six months that the position of Mr. Pierce has been such as to receive any commendation - I mean the position of his administration - that there has been a change in his policy I have no doubt. When he sent ^{to} to Kansas his design or that of his cabinet I am fully (?) of opinion was to make Kansas a free state. The ~~reason~~ the change in that policy took place I will not now stop to inquire into. Perhaps it sprang from the same motive which caused weak and vasallating councils to change their back on the original proposition when it was first introduced into the Senate. It may have been discovered that the question was strong enough to override "puny opposition." But his conduct towards those men who stood in the front of the fight could not be forgotten by them ^{ly} because at the last hour he seemed disposed to ^{ent} the tide that could no longer stay back & be borne upon its bosom again into power. I am now speaking of the reasons and motives on his part of those northern men in the convention who were opposed to his re nomination and while I would have voted for him if he had been the choice of the convention upon the grounds that he is now right or has been lately I am free to confess to you as you already know he was no favorite of mine. And he is one of the last men in this country I would head a for. I believe most of the difficulties we now have in Kansas have arisen from the fickleness, weakness, folly and vasallation of his policy in regard to that territory. Mr. Buchanan is not indebted for his nomination to any abolition or free soil or anti Kansas feeling on the part of any of the members of the Cincinnati convention. The truth is there were no such members there. But I could give you instances of men in the convention - true as steel to Kansas - who were against Pierce because of his course toward the Kansas men "at the period that tried men's souls" on that question. But I would not ^{those} points. The fact is as I state it. And you will find that there will be but few men at the north of previous free soil proclivities who vote for Buchanan. Some may but it will be those only who have or will make up their minds to abandon their heresies and for the future stand with the party upon the status of existing legislation. My word for it you need have no apprehension for the Wilmot Proviso hereafter if Buchanan should be elected. All men who look to any such result or could have a desire to produce it will fall into the fusion ranks of Black Republicanism which now seriously threaten to swamp the entire north. If I could today be assured of carrying the whole south 120 votes and Penna. and New Jersey I would be willing to

co . I am however not without hopes of carrying several other northern states towit Illinois, Iowa, California, Connecticut and perhaps New Hampshire & Maine - and it may be Indiana also - But the contest in all these states will be the hottest ever waged in politicks, and just as directly on the line as if Pierce had been the nominee. Apart from Buchanans declarations which I have heard of that he would have voted for the Bill if he had been in Congress - a part from his public speech in response to the resolutions of the Penna Democratic convention affirming that the Kansas Bill was not an act of "unnecessary legislation" but an act of justice & equality - which resolutions he approved - apart I say from those considerations he has fully & cordially endorsed the Cincinnati platform which fully identifies him with it and upon it he with all of us must stand or fall as the people in the contest may decide. Nor is his case at all analagous to that of General Scott in 1852. The Whig platform of that year it is true was sound enough upon the slavery question. It was satisfactory to or helped to draw it - me for I drew it - But General Scott would not express his approval of it. He took the nomination with the resolutions *annexed* (1). And it is well known that I never took any position against Scott *until* he refused to endorse or approve the Platform. Indeed after the nomination I stated to friends of his that I would vote for him if he would in his letter of acceptance give his approval to it. This he declined to do - and so far from it distinctly stated in his letter that he would not make those principles the policy of his administration so far as the conferring of patronage was concerned. It was when this letter of acceptance made its appearance that I for the first time announced my determination not to support him. Up to that time I had not committed myself against his support. I expressly refused to commit myself in conversation with Mr. Dawson and others just before they went to the convention,

though Dawson and other Fillmore men were open & in their declarations that they would not vote for Scott if nominated. Dawson said if Scott should be nominated there could not be an electoral ticket got up in Georgia for him. I told Dawson if Seward were nominated an electoral ticket would be run (?) in Georgia for him - That if the convention would put forth a local and national Platform such as that which was adopted and which I alluded to and nominate Scott on it and if he would plant himself upon it though I was very much opposed to his being the candidate on it yet nevertheless I would vote for him. These are facts. The Platform was adopted. Scott was nominated. He refused to give the Platform his approval. And I opposed his election while Mr. Dawson voted for him. Now in the present case I have seen nothing from Mr. Buchanan tending to show that he was not in sentiment with us as in the original Kansas movement. I know many of the warmest friends of his nomination even also the staunchest friends we had in that fight. I know he has publicly endorsed the declaration that the measure was not an unnecessary act - and above all I know that he is now openly and fully committed to the policy of the measure not only in past but in the future and I also know that the great body of the enemies of that measure both north and south will make the greatest efforts in their power to defeat him and mainly because of his present open and avowed position. But in the case of Scott the great mass of those at the north him and whom his would have tended more or less to bring into power openly repudiated the Platform upon which he was nominated. So much for this digression - which I hope you will excuse especially as you think I had not "half so strong a case for going against Scott" as I have for leading a rebellion against Buchanan in favor of Pierce or Douglas. Now I assure you again I look solely in all these questions to principles and not to men - or at least I look more to

principles than I do to men. Douglass was my choice and if for either of these men I could have been induced to head a rebellion it would have been for him. But in this case duty does not point that way as I feel the pressure of its . On the contrary I feel in the matter very much as Douglass expressed his own feelings on the subject. And here I will remark that I feel fully assured and satisfied that you are mistaken in supposing that Douglass was not nominated because he backed Pierce. I know the most influential men from the north in that convention who favored Buchanan's nomination were just as true and sound as Douglass himself. I have been with them in council in the darkest hours which ever enshrouded our cause. Their preference for Buchanan grew out of no opposition for Douglass' position or principles - from no disposition to yield an iota to the anti-Kansas feeling - but from a personal preference - and from the fact that Douglass' putting in for the nomination four years ago defeated Buchanan and caused Pierce an outsider to be taken up and whose whole policy until lately has been to strike down national men north and south. This is the reason for their preference and it is not only a natural one and a legitimate one but an excusable one in my opinion. These are my views give to you as fully and frankly as you gave yours to me. I am on the ground and speak of things I know. And as I understand the dictates of duty in the almost death struggle before us on the part of the friends of the union under the Constitution as it is and ought to be maintained on our side and the open and avowed enemies of both on the other side they prompt (?) me strongly not only to oppose Buchanan and thus cripple the efforts of the patriots throughout the land but to give them my cordial and warm cooperation. Whether this course will be the beginning or the end of my political ruin is a question of but little weight with me. If the country can be saved by a union of its

friends who make common cause to preserve it on the only basis on which it ought to be preserved I shall be content whatever fortune may betide myself. You express a sympathy for those true national constitution abiding men at the north who have been cut down for their maintenance of the right in days past. I feel the same. But you must allow me to say to you that ^{more} ~~more~~ of them fell under the hands of Pierce and his administration than by any other man's. These are the men who were most anxious for Buchanan's nomination. Some of them I know and the cause of their grievances I also know. And it was "natural" as men say for them to look to some other quarter for a leader than to the hand that smote them. I know it has been said that Buchanan's friends were looking to free soil support. This I tell you candidly from an observation on the ground in my opinion is a misconception. Those who were desirous of the nomination of Pierce favoured such ^w rumours. I could never find any real friend of Buchanan that ever put forth such an argument. I was very anxious that the contest between the several candidates for the nomination should not descend to such a system of warfare. I am well satisfied that it was not founded in truth and justice. Buchanan's antecedents were also brought up - his expressions on slavery expressed in his Texas speech - &c. Now upon all these points I have acted upon the principle of letting men's antecedents before 1850 be forgotten. On this principle only could I have supported Webster or Fillmore in 1852. And even since the passage of the Kansas Bill in 1852 I have not been disposed to make opposition to that measure a test for perpetual exclusion. I am willing to affiliate now with all who from this time hence forth will make the principles of that Bill in our policy the basis of legislation - those who will not only agree to let that Bill untouched upon the Statute Books but in future apply the same principles in all analagous cases. The great result of getting this policy sustained and established in

our government is the object to which I am looking. If in Georgia there should be a union of parties as you anticipate in support of Buchanan I should be rejoiced. But you or I certainly do not understand the position of the leaders of the Georgia K. Ns. if you suppose their position is the same as ~~EMERSON~~ that of Buchanan. In the Platform in Philadel. in Feb. last which Mr. Fillmore has endorsed the taking off of the Missouri restriction is one of the grave offenses brought against this Administration. That act Buchanan approves. Neither Fillmore or any of his Georgia leaders have ever signified any disposition to make the principles of the Kansas Bill as to slavery the basis of future legislation in the creation or formation of territorial governments. To this policy Mr. Buchanan and the whole party - every man that nominated him is fully committed - to get the whole country - all parties in Georgia and everywhere else brought to the same committal and acknowledgment is the height of my ambition. This is what I wish above all things to see accomplished. If John Van B for instance shall (should?) take down what he has said and give in his adhesion to sound and right doctrine even at the eleventh hour I would not close the door against him. The triumph of the truth is what I wish to see, and on this point I can say with earnestness and zeal to all who have heretofore fought us -

"while the camp holds out ^a to us -

"The vilest sinner may return" .

I am not looking to the success of men or parties. I am looking solely to the success of principles. And I do verily believe if in the approaching contest we shall succeed there will never be another sectional or slavery struggle in the United States at least in our day. For the first time in the history of the country has the direct~~ly~~ issue been presented - A right Platform presented

by a unanimous party with a candidate serving (?) squarely upon the principles announced was never before submitted to the American people. Upon the result of the issue the fate of the country may depend. I shall not now anticipate ~~what~~ contingencies or what may happen in case of defeat. I have a strong attachment for the Union^(?) as it was made and so long as it may be maintained under the constitution. I have strong faith in its being there (thus?) preserved. But now is the time when it is to be put to the trying test. My utmost efforts will be made on the side of those who look with the same objects and hopes that I do to the future. But I must stop. I can say no more now. I have written vastly more than I had any idea of writing when I took up my pen. My fingers are tired out. I fear you can not decipher what is already written or rather scribbled. I have given you however my views with that freedom and frankness which I thought was due no less to you than to myself.

Yours most respectfully

Alexander H Stephens

Hon. Thos. W. Thomas

Ellerton Ga.