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Title: Letters from James Buchanan to Nahum Capen

Date: 1849-1851

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Washington 22 January 1849.

My dear Sir,

Your review of the late war with Mexico, so far as I have found time to examine it, proves to be all that I had anticipated. The papers of Mr. Jefferson will cast much light upon the origin of parties in this Country; and in treating upon this subject you ought to have them before you. An appropriation of \$6000 has already been made by Congress for their publication; but this is to be made under the authority of the Joint Library Committee of Congress. When the papers were deposited in the State Department by J. Jefferson Randolph, he informed me that his brother, a member of the Charlottesville Bar in Virginia who was familiar with them all, desired to superintend their publication & under the circumstances, he would have strong claims for this appointment. The Library Committee, however, must decide.

Your proposed work, combined with the ability which
you have already displayed, would be one of the highest
importance; and when you visit Washington I shall
be happy to make your personal acquaintance & afford
you all the aid in my power.

Nathan Capen Esquire.

Yours very respectfully

James Buchanan

Washington, 22 January 1849

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Yours very respectfully
James Buchanan

Nahum Capen Esquire

9

Wheatland, near Lancaster 12 April 1851.

My dear Sir /
 Absence from home & other causes have too long
 prevented me from answering your favor of the 23^d ultimo. For this
 I hope you will pardon me.

Indeed I am not yet prepared to give you a list of the
 Democrats in this State who could ^{furnish} ~~give~~ the most satisfactory answers to
 your questions. Every person is so intent upon the interests of the
 present moment that we have but few antiquarians amongst us.
 I am just about leaving home for a week or ten days. After my
 return, I shall endeavor to give you a list of some names.

I have ^{or probably, I might say disposition} not had time, since I left Washington, to bestow
 any attention on my speeches &c.

The Country is, at present, in ~~an~~ dangerous I might
 almost say alarming condition. Disaffection to the Union is
 spreading in the extreme Southern States; & should South Carolina
 attempt to secede, which ~~may~~ Heaven forbid! no man can predict
 the consequences. The Southern people now perceive that even if the
 Fugitive Slave ^{Law} should be executed by the authorities in the Southern
 States, this will be at such a ruinous expense & at such personal
 risk & indignity, that the owners of Slaves generally will care to
 pursue them; & that instead of peace, this law has laid the foundation
 of incessant agitation.

Nathaniel Capen Esq

from your friend
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My dear Sir/

Absence from home & other causes have too long prevented me from answering your-favor of the 23d ultimo. For this I hope you will pardon me.

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from your friend
very respectfully
James Buchanan

Nahum Capen Esq

Wheatland, near Lancaster 2 May 1851.

My dear Sir /

In compliance with the promise contained
in my last I now send you the names of Peter A.
Browne Esquire & Hon: Richard Rush of Philadelphia, - Hon:
Ephraim Banks, & General J. N. Purviance of Harrisburg,
John Snyder Esquire of Pittsburg, Hon: George W. Woodward of
Wilkesbarre, Hon: J. S. Black of Somerset & General John
Cass of Cassville, Bucks County.

Private
In reply to yours of the 23 ultimo; - I should doubt
very much the policy of holding such a Convention as you
suggest, chiefly because I cannot conceive how the materials
north of Pennsylvania of which it would be composed could
harmonize. And even if ^{it} ~~they~~ were possible, ^{such an assembly} ~~could~~ ~~write~~ ^{could} write
in sustaining resolutions in favor of the compromise, how
would this tend to ^{re}write the old democrats of the South?

You are aware that in the States of Georgia, Alabama &
^{not to speak of South Carolina}
Mississippi, there ~~is~~ ^{is} now no Whig - no Democratic party. The
materials of which these parties were composed now constitute
the Union & the States Rights parties. Whilst both these parties

hold, and I think justly, that the compromise was a hard bargain
for the South, the former are in favor of acquiescence for the
sake of the Union, whilst the latter seem determined to insist
that a portion of the territory acquired by their & our joint efforts
~~shall~~ ^{shall} yet be opened to the property of Southern emigrants.
The improbability of executing the Fugitive Slave Law in the
Northern States, without such a ruinous expense & ~~for~~ such
personal indignity to the master as but few would be willing
to incur, together with the recent elections in Ohio, New York,
& Massachusetts of free soilers or abolitionists to the Senate,
has considerably increased the number of the State Rights party
in the far South. This party claim to be emphatically
Democratic. Under these peculiar circumstances, I think it
would be most wise for every sound & Union loving Democrat
within his own sphere, ^{& within his own State} by all the means in his power, to
advocate the faithful execution of the Fugitive Slave Law,
without resorting to the dangerous experiment of a sectional
Convention, composed of delegates from States in a particular
division of the Union. Such a Convention could adopt no
resolutions which would satisfy both parties in the far South;
whilst the example might be dangerous. Better leave the South
to themselves; & at last, I trust & hope after the violent effervescence
now existing there, they may at last ^{generally} settle down into an
acquiescence in the measures of compromise. These are my opinions,

thought I may be mistaken & am open to conviction.

The Senatorial election in Massachusetts is a very bad omen;
because it shews that the State is nearly unanimous on the free soil
question. Between Sumner & Winthrop I would not give a ballot for
the choice, & Webster whilst he has recently acted wisely & well is now gathering the
better fruit of his long continued efforts to stamp
the North by ministering to Northern prejudices
against Southern Slavery.

Nathaniel Capen Esq

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