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THE PAPERS OF WILLIE PERSON MANGUM

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If you can find time from more importance duties, it would afford me the highest satisfaction to hear from you.—

With the highest regards, I remain &c.

ROB. B. GILLIAM.

Hon. W. P. Mangum.

[Addressed:] Washington City.

WPM-LC

John Chavis⁹⁸ to Willie P. Mangum

April 4th. 1836

My dear Sir/

Notwithstanding I am looking anxiously for a letter from you by the next mail, yet my feelings compels me to write before it comes. The multiplicity of the petitions which appear to be presented to Congress praying that a Law may be passed for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia bears upon me with so much pain, that I cannot be silent any longer. All I expect to effect by writing is to let you know that I am radically and heartily opposed to the passing such a Law, a Law which would be fraught with so many mischievous and dangerous consequences. I am already of the opinion that Congress has no more right to pass such a Law than I have to go to your house & take Orange & bring him home & keep him as my servant. And I am astonished that the members of Congress act so much like a parcel of mullets nibbling at baite upon fish hooks. Why dont they act like men who love their Country their wives & their Children, and come up boldly to the subject of those petitions & put their feet upon them & stamp them to the centre, of the earth, in such a manner, that all the powers on earth never could be able to raise them again—

It is clear to me, that the cession of the 12 miles square to the General Government does not give the smallest license to Congress to pass such a Law, and why? because the officers or managers of the Government saw it was not only absolutely necessary, to build a capitol & other houses for the different officers to live in & transact the business of the Government—but to lay off a part of the Land in Town lots, & sell them to purchasers that they might have citizens to maintain the members of Congress & other persons who might resort their for the purpose of trans-

⁹⁸See above, I, 41n.

acting business. Then this being the case every purchaser has a complete & perfect right to put or place any kind of property on it he may think proper. Then as the Laws of the Country have made slaves the property of the holder equal to his cow or his horse and that he has a perfect right to dispose of them as he pleases. I ask what possible ground or pretext can there be for supposing, that Congress has a right to pass a Law for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia? It is clear to me that those petitioners might as well, and would do it with equal propriety ask Congress to pass a Law to sell the furniture out of the houses of the citizens as to pass a Law to take away their slaves from them. And suppose Congress was foolish enough to pass such a Law what would be the consequence? The Laws of the Land declare that no Legislative body shall pass a Law to take away the property of a man without making remuneration. And here I would ask has Congress the means at hand to remunerate the slave holders in the District of Columbia for the property here taken from them? They dare not put their hands into the National chest. that money is a sacred deposit & placed there for a very different purpose & therefore they dare not touch it. & what is to be done? What madness in those Petitioners—can any madness be equal to it unless it be that of a mans hastening himself by his folly to eternal destruction! where if they would rightly consider it their efforts are paving the way to the destruction of the peace & happiness of the Country—

That slavery is a national evil no one doubts, but what is to be done? It exists & what can be done with it? All that can be done, is to make the best of a bad bargain. For I am clearly of the opinion that immediate emancipation would be to entail the greatest earthly curse upon my bretheren according to the flesh that could be conferred upon them especially in a Country like ours, I suppose if they knew I said this they would be ready to take my life, but as I wish them well I feel no disposition to see them any more miserable than they are—

I believe that there are a part of the abolitionists that have, and do, acting from pure motives, but I think they have zeal without knowledge, and are doing more mischief than they expect. There is I think, another part that are seeking for loaves and fishes & are an exceedingly dangerous set—And I believe that they are many & have their seats all over the United States,

and I would advise the Americans that as long as slavery exists so long they ought to be on the alert & upon the watch Tower, for those abominable wretches I believe dont intend to give up the point Therefore to arrest their efforts as much as possible I would be glad that Congress would at once put to silence those petitioners; for the longer they stir them the stronger they will smell & their baneful scent I fear will spread throughout the United States & do much mischief—

Although I have ever been opposed to the election of Mr Van Buren, I never would suffer myself to believe he was an abolitionist until I saw his elaborate reply to Mr Ames & others,⁹⁹ and now I believe it to be an electioneering Trick from the beginning to the end & will in all probability, have its desired effect with many. & he is now standing behind the curtain, as a radical abolitionist looking on & laughing in his sleeves. Why dont he act like Judge White come boldly up to the subject & speak out like a man who loves his Country men women & children? No he is for the loaves & fishes I am the unshaken friend.

JOHN CHAVES

P.S. Pray dont fail to answer respecting the Rogers debt. I must conclude by observing that I am done, the pressure of this winter has put it out of my power to keep house after this year—but must depend solely & alone upon the bounty of my friends a painful consideration.

[Addressed:]

Hon. Willie P. Mangum Esqr
Washington City

Mail

District of Columbia

*Willie P. Mangum to Sally A. Mangum*¹⁰⁰

Washington City 7th April 1836

My dear daughter.

I received your letter sometime ago, and was very much pleased to learn that you were well.

⁹⁹Van Buren voted for the bill to prevent the postmasters in slave states from delivering incendiary mail. In a reply to a letter he stated that Congress had no power to interfere with slavery in any state. He further stated that although Congress might have the authority, he felt that it was unwise to restrict slavery in the District of Columbia. McMaster, *History of the People of the U. S.*, VI, 364.

¹⁰⁰The original is in the possession of Miss Preston Weeks, Washington, D. C.