

Monticello Apr. 22. 20.

(197)

I thank you, Dear Sir, for the copy you have been so kind  
as to send me of the letters of your constituents on the Missouri question.  
It is a perfect justification to them. I had for a long time ceased to read  
newspapers or pay any attention to public affairs, confident they were  
in good hands, and content to be a passenger in our bark to the shore from  
which I am not distant. but this momentous question, like a fire bell in the  
night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as  
the knell of the Union. it is hushed indeed for the moment. but this is a  
reprieve only, not a final sentence. a geographical line, coinciding with  
a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up  
to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new  
will mark it deeper and deeper. I can say with conscious truth that there is  
not a man on earth who would sacrifice more than I would, to relieve us from  
this heavy reproach, in any practicable way. The cession of that kind of pro-  
-perty, for so it is misnamed, is a bagatelle which would not cost me a second  
thought, if, in that way, a general emancipation and expatriation could be  
effected: and, gradually, and with due sacrifices, I think it might be. but, as  
it is, we have the wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him, nor safely  
let him go. justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other. of one  
thing I am certain, that as the passage of slaves from one state to another  
would not make a slave of a single human being who could not be so without it,  
so their diffusion over a greater surface would make them individually happier  
and proportionally facilitate the accomplishment of their emancipation, by  
dividing the burthen on a greater number of co-adjutors. an abstinence too  
from this act of power would remove the jealousy excited by the undertakings  
of Congress, to regulate the condition of the different descriptions of men com-  
-posing a state. this certainly is the exclusive right of every state, which nothing

in the constitution has taken from them and given to the general government  
could congress, for example, say that the Non-freemen of Connecticut, shall  
be freemen, or that they shall not emigrate into any other state?

I regret that I am <sup>now</sup> to die in the belief that the useless sacrifice of them-  
selves, by the generation of '76. to acquire self government and happiness  
to their country, is to be thrown away by the unwise and unworthy passions  
of their sons, and that my only consolation is to be that I live not to weep  
over it. ~~Therefore~~ if they would but dispassionately weigh the blessings they  
will throw away against an abstract principle more likely to be effected by  
union than by secession, they would pause before they would perpetrate this act  
of suicide on themselves and of treason against the hopes of the world.  
To yourself as the faithful advocate of union I tender the offering of my  
high esteem and respect.

Th: Jefferson