

Abraham Lincoln papers

From John C. Fremont to Charles Sumner [With Endorsement by Lincoln]¹, June 9, 1863

¹ A committee from New York visited Lincoln on May 30 and urged him to place General Fremont in command of a force of at least 10,000 black soldiers (see New York City Citizens Committee to Abraham Lincoln, May 28, 1863). Lincoln's response to the scheme (to which both he and Fremont were lukewarm) is in *Collected Works*, VI, 239 and Lincoln to Sumner, June 1, 1863. Fremont's own response follows.

New York

June 9. 1863

No. 21 West 19th St.

My dear Mr. Sumner

I have delayed a few days my reply to your kind note, for which I beg you to accept the reason that I was occupied with replying to the ungrounded — shifting — insaisiable and land-squatter argument of Gen. Butler² in support of his claim to be the ranking General in the U. S. Armies.

² Benjamin F. Butler

I had deferred it until the time allotted for an answer began to run out — having been busy about the Pacific Railroad. I was pressingly reminded of your note by a visit from the committee which had called upon Mr. Lincoln & to which he had promised this letter to you.³ I beg you will say to the President that this movement does not, in the remotest way originate with me. On the contrary when the Committee called upon me I declined positively to enter into it, or to consent to having my name mentioned to the President in connection with it. The reasons which I gave to the Committee were simply that I disapproved the project of raising and sending to the field, colored troops in scattered and weak detachments. That it would only result in disaster to the colored troops & would defeat effectually the expectations of the Govt. to mass them in a solid force against the rebellion. No short reaching or partial plans can possibly succeed.

³ See New York City Citizens Committee to Abraham Lincoln, May 28, 1863.

I told them that if I had been placed in the Dept. which the President & Secretary arranged for me when I was last in Washington & in which I should have had a suitable field for this organization and white troops to protect it — and ensure its success — I could have undertaken it & have undoubtedly organized a formidable force imminently dangerous to the Confederacy. But these views were merely in answer to the committee and ended my relation to the subject. I beg you to say to the President that I have no design to embarrass him with creating a Dept. for me. In my judgment this whole business is as dangerous and difficult as it is important. It demands ability and great discretion and a fixed belief in the necessity of the work and should only be undertaken upon some plan which would embrace the whole subject and then be intrusted only to some officer of ability and judgment to whom the President would be willing to give the necessary powers. He must have power and the President's confidence. Therefore I do not propose my self for this work. But I make him the following suggestions — it being understood that I am thrown out of the question — namely:

Make a Dep't. of the Country west of the Mppi — Louisiana excluded — send them a suitable officer — give him full command of the Dept. & the white troops — Govr Gamble⁴ himself included — & let him draw the colored troops together from every quarter — and organize and consolidate them. He will have the whole line of the Mppi. river for his operations — and draw the Colored men from the free North & the freed men from the entire South. In this way the west country and the Mppi river would be closed to the Confederacy by an Army of 200000 men which at the proper time could take a deciding part in the war. This is my view of the subject, but is this time yet come? Will the President realize that if this summer's campaigns are not successful the Confederacy is well nigh established? I think not. So if you think he will mix me up with the war-plan-makers of whose importunities he says he is tired — please say nothing to him about it. But pray don't let him think that I am moving in any direction — or by any persons to get this command. Enclosed I return the President's letter⁵ — which I have shewn to no one.

4 Hamilton R. Gamble

5 See Lincoln to Charles Sumner, June 1, 1863.

I informed the Committee that I had rec'd. it — through your self — but could not communicate its purport without the authority of the President.

Will you please make my thanks to the President for his friendly expressions in my favor and accept my very warm thanks to yourself. I have just had a visit from your Governor — interesting and agreeable as his visits always are

Yours Truly

J. C. Frémont

Col. James Fairman of the committee has just called with a note from your self authorizing me to shew him the President's letter — which I did accordingly—

J. C. F.

[Endorsed on Envelope by Lincoln:]

Gen. Fremont, June 9, 1863.