

Lewis Tappan to John T. Norton

New York January 20, 1841

My Dear Sir:

The Com[mittee]. on behalf of the Amistad Captives wish you to meet Thomas Fessenden Esq. of this city, in Hartford, Friday afternoon at the City Hotel. He expects to leave here Friday morning for Hartford.

We are greatly apprehensive that the Supreme Court will decide against the Africans. Advice from Washington confirms this apprehension. Still, Mr. Baldwin is sanguine of success. If the decision is as we fear, the Executive will be very quick in removing the Africans out of the reach of philanthropy.

A consultation had best take place immediately in Hartford in reference to [applying] for a writ of *habeas corpus*. On receipt of this, we hope you will go to Hartford immediately. If you think proper to consult or take with you Mr. Williams or Mr. Deming or both, please do it.

It is our opinion that serious had best take place in Hartford immediately with reference to applying to CT. J[udge]? Williams to allow a writ of habeus corpus to issue returnable to him. This will bring up the case for adjudication before the action of the Supreme Court is known. The Africans are now detained without law. It will therefore be a legal thing to set them at liberty. After the decision at Washington is known a Conn. Judge might be reluctant to interfere. This action at Conn. Ought not to affect the judgment of the Sup. Court at Washington.

Mr. Fessenden is a highly respectable Counselor-at-Law of this city & a professed abolitionist. He understands the facts in the case & is a man of sound judgment. We have employed him at considerable expense to go to Hartford to consult with some of the leading brethren there, and then to act as circumstances may dictate. The names of the Com. here had best be kept out of sight, and the proceedings had in the name of gentlemen in Connecticut. We had thought your name would be sufficient. You can judge of this. It does not appear desirable to have many consulted.

On receipt of this we hope you will go to Hartford immediately. If you think proper to consult or take with Mr. Williams or Mr. Deming, or both, please do so.

Any expense to be incurred will be promptly met from the funds in our hands.

Very truly yours

Lewis Tappan  
S.S. Jocelyn