

WILLIAM HENRY SEWARD      MARCH 11, 1850  
SPEECH TO THE UNITED STATES SENATE

\_\_\_Excerpts\_\_\_

[Prefatory remarks]

I proceed now to state my reasons for the opinion that CALIFORNIA OUGHT TO BE ADMITTED. The population of the United States consists of natives of Caucasian origins, and exotics of the same derivation. The native mass rapidly assimilates to itself and absorbs the exotic, and thus these constitute one homogeneous people. The African race, bond and free, and the aborigines, savage and civilized, being incapable of such assimilation and absorption, remain distinct; and, owing to their peculiar condition, they constitute inferior masses, and may be regarded as accidental if not disturbing political forces. The ruling homogeneous family planted at first on the Atlantic shore, and following an obvious law, is seen continually and rapidly spreading itself westward year by year, subduing the wilderness and the prairie, and thus extending this great political community, which, as fast as it advances, breaks into distinct states for municipal purposes only, while the whole constitutes one entire contiguous and compact nation. . . .

Allowing due consideration to the increasing density of our population, we are safe in assuming, that long before this mass shall have attained the maximum of numbers indicated, the entire width of our possessions from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean will be covered by it, and be brought into social maturity and complete political organization.

The question now arises, Shall this one great people, having a common origin, a common language, a common religion, common sentiments, interests, sympathies, and hopes, remain one political state, one nation, one republic, or shall it be broken into two conflicting and probably hostile nations or republics? There cannot ultimately be more than two; for the habit of association is already formed, as the interests of mutual intercourse are being formed. It is already ascertained where the centre of political power must rest. It must rest in the agricultural interests and masses, who will occupy the interior of the continent. These masses, if they cannot all command access to both oceans, will not be obstructed in their approaches to that one, which shall offer the greatest facilities for commerce.

Shall the American people, then, be divided? Before deciding on this question, let us consider our position, our power, and capabilities.

The world contains no seat of empire so magnificent as this; which, while it embraces all the varying climates of the temperate zone, and is traversed by wide expanding lakes and long  
30 branching rivers, offers supplies on the Atlantic shores to the over-crowded nations of Europe, while on the Pacific coast it intercepts the commerce of the Indies. The nation thus situated, and enjoying forest, mineral, and agricultural resources unequaled, if endowed also with moral energies adequate to the achievement of great enterprises, and favored with a government adapted to their character and condition, must command the empire of the seas, which alone is real empire.

We think that we may claim to have inherited physical and intellectual vigor, courage, invention, and enterprise; and the systems of education prevailing among us open to all the stores of human science and art.

The old world and the past were allotted by Providence to the pupilage of mankind, under the hard discipline of arbitrary power, quelling the violence of human passions. The new world and  
40 the future seem to have been appointed for the maturity of mankind, with the development of self-government operating in obedience to reason and judgment.

We have thoroughly tried our novel system of Democratic Federal Government, with its complex, yet harmonious and effective combination of distinct local elective agencies, for the conduct of domestic affairs, and its common central elective agencies, for the regulation of internal interests and of intercourse with foreign nations; and we know that it is a system equally cohesive in its parts, and capable of all desirable expansion; and that it is a system, moreover, perfectly adapted to secure domestic tranquility, while it brings into activity all the elements of national aggrandizement. The Atlantic states, through their commercial, social, and political affinities and sympathies, are steadily renovating the governments and the social constitutions of Europe and of Africa. The  
50 Pacific states must necessarily perform the same sublime and beneficent functions in Asia. If, then, the American people shall remain an undivided nation, the ripening civilization of the West, after a separation growing wider and wider for four thousand years, will, in its circuit of the world, meet again and mingle with the declining civilization of the East on our own free soil, and a new and more perfect civilization will arise to bless the earth, under the sway of our own cherished and beneficent democratic institutions.

We may then reasonably hope for greatness, felicity, and renown, excelling any hitherto attained by any nation, if, standing firmly on the continent, we loose not our grasp on the shore of either ocean. Whether a destiny so magnificent would be only partially defeated, or whether it

would be altogether lost, by a relaxation of that grasp, surpasses our wisdom to determine, and  
60 happily it is not important to be determined. It is enough, if we agree that expectations so grand, yet  
so reasonable and so just, ought not to be in any degree disappointed. And now it seems to me that  
the perpetual unity of the empire hangs on the decision of this day and of this hour. . . .

The question whether she [California] shall be one of the United States of America *has* depended on  
her and on us. Her election has been made. Our consent alone remains suspended; and that consent  
must be pronounced *now* or *never*. I say *now* or *never*. Nothing prevents it now, but want of  
agreement among ourselves. Our harmony cannot increase while this question remains open. . . .

But it is insisted that the admission of California shall be attended by a COMPROMISE of  
70 questions which have arisen out of SLAVERY!

I AM OPPOSED TO ANY SUCH COMPROMISE, IN ANY AND ALL THE FORMS IN  
WHICH IT HAS BEEN PROPOSED; because, while admitting the purity and patriotism of all from  
whom it is my misfortune to differ, I think all legislative compromises, which are fortune to differ, I  
think all legislative compromises, which are not absolutely necessary, radically wrong and  
essentially vicious. They involve the surrender of the exercise of judgment and conscience on  
distinct and separate questions, at distinct and separate times, with the indispensable advantages it  
affords for ascertaining truth. They involve a relinquishment of the right to reconsider in future the  
decisions of the present, on questions prematurely anticipated. And they are acts of usurpation as to  
future questions of the province of future legislators.

80 Sir, it seems to me as if slavery had laid its paralyzing hand upon myself, and the blood were  
coursing less freely than its wont through my veins, when I endeavor to suppose that such a  
compromise has been effected, and that my utterance forever is arrested upon all the great questions  
—social, moral, and political—arising out of a subject so important, and as yet so incomprehen-  
sible.

What am I to receive in this compromise? Freedom in California. It is well; it is a noble  
acquisition; it is worth a sacrifice. But what am I to give as an equivalent? A recognition of the  
claim to perpetuate slavery in the District of Columbia; forbearance toward more stringent laws  
concerning the arrest of persons suspected of being slaves found in the free states; forbearance from  
the proviso of freedom in the charters of new territories. None of the plans of compromise offered  
90 demand less than two, and most of them insist on all of these conditions. The equivalent, then, is,

some portion of liberty, some portion of human rights in one region for liberty in another region. But California brings god and commerce as well as freedom. I am, then, to surrender some portion of human freedom in the District of Columbia, and in East California and New Mexico, for the mixed consideration of liberty, gold, and power, on the Pacific coast. . . .

Far, far from us be that false and affected candor that is eternally in treaty with crime—that half virtue, which, like the ambiguous animal that flies about in the twilight of a compromise between day and night, is, to a just man's eye, an odious and disgusting thing. There is no middle point, my lords, in which the commons of Great Britain can meet tyranny and oppression.

100 But, sir, if I could overcome my repugnance to compromises in general, I should object to this one, on the ground of the *inequality* and *incongruity* of the interests to be compromised. Why, sir, according to the views I have submitted, California ought to come in, and must come in, whether slavery stand or fall in the District of Columbia; whether slavery stand or fall in New Mexico and Eastern California; and even whether slavery stand or fall in the slave states. California ought to come in, being a free state; and, under the circumstances of her conquest, her compact, her abandonment, her justifiable and necessary establishment of a constitution, and the inevitable dismemberment of the empire consequent upon her rejection, I should have voted for her admission even if she had come as a slave state. California ought to come in, and must come in at all events. It is, then, an independent, a paramount question. What, then, are these questions arising out of  
110 slavery, thus interposed, but collateral questions? They are unnecessary and incongruous, and therefore false issues, not introduced designedly, indeed, to defeat that great policy, yet unavoidably tending to that end. . . .

It is now avowed by the honorable senator from South Carolina, that nothing will satisfy the slave states but a compromise that will convince them that they can remain in the Union consistently with their honor and their safety. And what are the concessions which will have that effect. Here they are, in the words of that senator:

The north must do justice by conceding to the south an equal right in the acquired territory, and do her duty by causing the stipulations relative to fugitive slaves to be faithfully fulfilled—  
120 cease the agitation of the slave question, and provide for the insertion of a provision in the Constitution, by an amendment, which will restore to the south in substance the power she

possessed, of protecting herself, before the equilibrium between the sections was destroyed by the action of the government.

These terms amount to this: that the free states having already, or although they may hereafter have, majorities of population, and majorities in both houses of Congress, shall concede to the slave states, being in a minority in both, the unequal advantage of an equality. That is, that we shall alter the Constitution so as to convert the Government from a national democracy, operating by a constitutional majority of voices, into a federal alliance, in which the minority shall have a veto against the majority. And this would be nothing less than to return to the original Articles of

130 Confederation.

I will not stop to protest against the injustice or the inexpediency of an innovation which, if it was practicable, would be so entirely subversive of the principle of democratic institutions. It is enough to say that it is totally impracticable. The free states, northern and western, have acquiesced in the long and nearly unbroken ascendancy of the slave states under the Constitution, because the result happened under the Constitution. But they have honor and interests to preserve, and there is nothing in the nature of mankind, or in the character of that people to induce an expectation that they, loyal as they are, are insensible to the duty of defending them. But the scheme would still be impracticable, even if this difficulty were overcome. What is proposed is a *political* equilibrium.

Every political equilibrium requires a *physical* equilibrium to rest upon, and is valueless without it. To constitute a physical equilibrium between the slave states and the free states, requires, first, an equality of territory, or some near approximation. And this is already lost. But it requires much more than this. It requires an equality or a proximate equality in the number of slaves and freemen. And this must be perpetual. . . .

Sir, the equilibrium, if restored, would be lost again, and lost more rapidly than it was before. The progress of the free population is to be accelerated by increased emigration, and by new tides from South America and from Europe and Asia, while that of the slaves is to be checked and retarded by inevitable partial emancipation. "Nothing," says Montesquieu, "reduces a man so low as always to see freemen, and yet not to be free. Persons in that condition are natural enemies of the state, and their numbers would be dangerous if increased too high." Sir, the fugitive slave colonies and the emancipated slave colonies in the free states, in Canada, and in Liberia, are the best guaranties South Carolina has for the perpetuity of slavery.

150 *Nor would success attend any of the details of this compromise.* And, first, I advert to the proposed alteration of the law concerning fugitives from service or labor. I shall speak on this as on

all subjects, with due respect, but yet frankly and without reservation. The Constitution contains only a compact, which rests for its execution on the states. Not content with this, the slave states induced legislation by Congress; and the Supreme Court of the United States have virtually decided that the whole subject is within the province of Congress, and exclusive of state authority. Nay, they have decided that slaves are to be regarded not merely as persons to be claimed, but as property and chattels, to be seized without any legal authority or claim whatever. The compact is thus subverted by the procurement of the slave states. With what reason, then, can they expect the states *ex gratia* to reassume the obligations from which they caused those states to be discharged? I say, then, to the slave states, you are entitled to no more stringent laws; and that such laws would be useless. The cause of the inefficiency of the present statute is not at all the leniency of its provisions. It is a law that deprives the alleged refugee from a legal obligation not assumed by him, but imposed upon him by laws enacted before he was born, of the writ of *habeas corpus*, and of any certain judicial process of examination of the claim set up by his pursuer, and finally degrades him into a chattel which may be seized and carried away peaceably wherever found, even although exercising the rights and responsibilities of a free citizen of the commonwealth in which he resides, and of the United States—a law which denies to the citizen all the safeguards of personal liberty, to render less frequent the escape of the bondman. And since complaints are so freely made against the one side, I shall not hesitate to declare that there have been even greater faults on the other side. Relying on the perversion of the Constitution, which makes slaves mere chattels, the slave states have applied to them the principles of the criminal law, and have held that he who aided the escape of his fellow-man from bondage was guilty of a larceny in stealing him. I speak of what I know. Two instances came within my own knowledge, in which governors of slave states, under the provision of the Constitution relating to fugitives from justice, demanded from the governor of a free state the surrender of persons as thieves whose alleged offences consisted in constructive larceny of the rags that covered the persons of female slaves, whose attempt to escape they had permitted or assisted.

We deem the principle of the law for the recapture of fugitives, as thus expounded, therefore, unjust, unconstitutional, and immoral; and thus, while patriotism withholds its approbation, the consciences of our people condemn it.

You will say that these convictions of ours are disloyal. Grant it for the sake of argument. They are, nevertheless, honest; and the law is to be executed among us, not among you; not by us, but by the federal authority. Has any government ever succeeded in changing the moral convictions of its subjects by force? But these convictions imply no disloyalty. We reverence the Constitution,

although we perceive this defect, just as we acknowledge the splendor and the power of the sun, although its surface is tarnished with here and there an opaque spot.

190 Your constitution and laws convert hospitality to the refugee from the most degrading oppression on earth into a crime, but all mankind except you esteem that hospitality a virtue. The right of extradition of a fugitive from justice is not admitted by the law of nature and of nations, but rests in voluntary compacts. . . .

. . . The law of nations disavows such compacts; the law of nature, written on the hearts and consciences of freemen, repudiates them. Armed power could not enforce them, because there is no public conscience to sustain them. I know that there are laws of various sorts which regulate the conduct of men. There are constitutions and statutes, codes mercantile and codes civil; but when we are legislating for states, especially when we are founding states, all these laws must be brought to the standard of the laws of God, and must be tried by that standard, and must stand or fall by it. . . .

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To conclude on this point. We are not slaveholders. We cannot, in our judgment, be either true Christians or real freemen, if we impose on another a chain that we defy all human power to fasten on ourselves. You believe and think otherwise, and doubtless with equal sincerity. We judge you not, and He alone who ordained the conscience of man and its laws of action can judge us. Do we, then, in this conflict of opinion, demand of you an unreasonable thing in asking that, since you will have property that can and will exercise human powers to effect its escape, you shall be your own police, and in acting among us as such you shall conform to principles indispensable to the security of admitted rights of freemen? If you will have this law executed, you must alleviate, not increase, its rigors.

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Another feature in most of these plans of compromise is a bill of peace for slavery in the District of Columbia; and this bill of peace we cannot grant. We of the free states are, equally with you of the slave states, responsible for the existence of slavery in this district, the field exclusively of our common legislation. I regret that, as yet, I see little reason to hope that a majority in favor of emancipation exists here. The legislature of New York, from whom, with great deference, I dissent, seems willing to accept now the extinction of the slave trade, and waive emancipation. But we shall assume the whole responsibility if we stipulate not to exercise the power hereafter when a majority shall be obtained. Nor will the plea with which you would furnish us be of any avail. If I could understand so mysterious a paradox myself, I never should be able to explain to the apprehension of the people whom I represent, how it was that an absolute and express power to legislate in all cases

220 over the District of Columbia was embarrassed and defeated by an implied condition not to legislate for the abolition of slavery in this district. Sir, I shall vote for that measure, and am willing to appropriate any means necessary to carry it into execution. And, if I shall be asked what I did to embellish the capital of my country, I will point to her freedmen, and say, These are the monuments of my munificence!

If I was willing to advance a cause that I deem sacred by disingenuous means, I would advise you to adopt those means of compromise which I have thus examined. The echo is not quicker in its response that would be that loud and universal cry of repeal, that would not die away until the *habeas corpus* was secured to the alleged fugitive from bondage, and the symmetry of the free institutions of the capital was perfected.

230 I apply the same observations to the proposition for a waiver of the proviso of freedom in territorial charters. Thus far you have only direct popular action in favor of that ordinance, and there seems even to be a partial disposition to await the action of the people of the new territories, as we have compulsorily waited for it in California. But I must tell you, nevertheless, in candor and in plainness, that the spirit of the people of the free states is set upon a spring that rises with the pressure put upon it. That spring, if pressed too hard, will give a recoil that will not leave here one servant who knew his master's will, and did it not.

You will say that this implies violence. Not at all. It implies only peaceful, lawful, constitutional, customary action. I cannot too strongly express my surprise that those who insist that the people of the slave states cannot be held back from remedies outside of the Constitution, should 240 so far misunderstand us of the free states as to suppose we would not exercise our constitutional rights to sustain the policy which we deem just and beneficent. . . .

. . . JOHN JAY, in the *Federalist*, says:

Let the case of the slaves be considered, as it is in truth, a peculiar one. Let the compromising expedient of the Constitution be mutually adopted which regards them as *inhabitants*, but as debased below the equal level of free inhabitants, which regards the slave as divested of two-fifths of the man. . . .

I deem it established, then, that the Constitution does not recognize property in man, but 250 leaves that question, as between the states, to the law of nature and of nations. That law, as expounded by Vattel, is founded on the reason of things. When God had created the earth, with its wonderful adaptations, He gave dominion over it to man, absolute human dominion. The title of

that dominion, thus bestowed, would have been incomplete, if the lord of all terrestrial things could himself have been the property of his fellow-man.

The right to *have* a slave implies the right in some one to *make* the slave; that right must be equal and mutual, and this would resolve society into a state of perpetual war. But if we grant the original equality of the states, and grant also the constitutional recognition of slaves as property, still the argument we are considering fails. Because the states are not parties to the Constitution as states; it is the Constitution of the people of the United States.

260 But even if the states continue under the Constitution as states, they nevertheless surrendered their equality as states, and submitted themselves to the sway of the numerical majority, with qualifications or checks; first, of the representation of three-fifth of slaves in the ratio of representation and taxation; and, secondly, of the equal representation of states in the Senate.

The proposition of an established classification of states as *slave states* and *free states*, as insisted on by some, and into *northern* and *southern*, as maintained by others, seems to me purely imaginary, and of course the supposed equilibrium of those classes a mere conceit. This must be so, because, when the Constitution was adopted, twelve of the thirteen states were slave states, and so there was no equilibrium. And so as to the classification of states as northern states and southern states. It is the maintenance of slavery by law in a state, not parallels of latitude, that makes it a southern state; and the absence of this, that makes it a northern state. And so all the states, save one, were southern states, and there was no equilibrium. But the Constitution was made not only for southern and northern states, but for states neither northern nor southern, namely, the western states, their coming in being foreseen and provided for. . . .

270 There is another aspect of the principle of compromise which deserves consideration. It assumes that slavery, if not the only institution in a slave state, is at least a ruling institution, and that this characteristic is recognized by the Constitution. But *slavery* is only *one* of many institutions there. Freedom is equally an institution there. Slavery is only a temporary, accidental, partial, and incongruous one. Freedom, on the contrary, is a perpetual, organic, universal one, in harmony with the Constitution of the United States. The slaveholder himself stands under the protection of the latter, in common with all the free citizens of the state. But it is, moreover, an indispensable institution. You may separate slavery from South Carolina, and the state will still remain; but if you subvert freedom there, the state will cease to exist. But the principle of this compromise gives complete ascendancy in the slave states, and in the Constitution of the United States, to the subordinate, accidental, and incongruous institution, over its paramount antagonist. To

reduce this claim of slavery to an absurdity, it is only necessary to add that there are only two states in which slaves are a majority, and not one in which the slaveholders are not a very disproportionate minority.

290 But there is yet another aspect in which this principle must be examined. It regards the domain only as a possession, to be enjoyed either in common or by partition by the citizens of the old states. It is true, indeed, that the national domain is ours. It is true it was acquired by the valor and with the wealth of the whole nation. But we hold, nevertheless, no arbitrary power over it. We hold no arbitrary authority over anything, whether acquired lawfully or seized by usurpation. The Constitution regulates our stewardship; the Constitution devotes the domain to union, to justice, to defence, to welfare, and to liberty.

300 But there is a higher law than the Constitution, which regulates our authority over the domain, and devotes it to the same noble purposes. The territory is a part, no inconsiderable part, of the common heritage of mankind, bestowed upon them by the Creator of the universe. We are his stewards, and must so discharge our trust as to secure in the highest attainable degree their happiness. . . .

310 And now the simple, bold, and even awful question which presents itself to us is this: Shall we, who are founding institutions, social and political, for countless millions; shall we, who know by experience the wise and the just, and are free to choose them, and to reject the erroneous and unjust; shall we establish human bondage, or permit it by our sufferance to be established? Sir, our forefathers would not have hesitated an hour. They found slavery existing here, and they left it only because they could not remove it. There is not only no free state which would now establish it, but there is no slave state, which, if it had had the free alternative as we now have, would have founded slavery. Indeed, our revolutionary predecessors had precisely the same question before them in establishing an organic law under which the states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin, have since come into the Union, and they solemnly repudiated and excluded slavery from those states forever. I confess that the most alarming evidence of our degeneracy which has yet been given is found in the fact that we even debate such a question.

Sir, there is no Christian nation, thus free to choose as we are, which would establish slavery. I speak on due consideration, because Britain, France, and Mexico, have abolished slavery, and all other European states are preparing to abolish it as speedily as they can. We cannot establish slavery, because there are certain elements of the security, welfare, and greatness of nations, which we all admit, or ought to admit, and recognize as essential; and these are the security of natural

rights, the diffusion of knowledge, and the freedom of industry. Slavery is incompatible with all of  
320 these; and, just in proportion to the extent that it prevails and controls in any republican state, just to  
that extent it subverts the principle of democracy, and converts the state into an aristocracy or a  
despotism. . . .

I cannot stop to debate long with those who maintain that slavery is itself practically  
economical and humane. I might be content with saying that there are some axioms in political  
science that a statesman or a founder of states may adopt, especially in the Congress of the United  
States, and that among those axioms are these: That all men are created equal, and have inalienable  
rights of life, liberty, and the choice of pursuits of happiness; that knowledge promotes virtue, and  
righteousness exalteth a nation; that freedom is preferable to slavery, and that democratic  
330 governments, where they can be maintained by acquiescence, without force, are preferable to  
institutions exercising arbitrary and irresponsible power.

It remains only to remark that our own experience has proved the dangerous influence and  
tendency of slavery. All our apprehensions of dangers, present and future, begin and end with  
slavery. If slavery, limited as it yet is, now threatens to subvert the Constitution, how can we, as  
wise and prudent statesmen, enlarge its boundaries and increase its influence, and thus increase  
already impending dangers? Whether, then, I regard merely the welfare of the future inhabitants of  
the new territories, or the security and welfare of the whole people of the United States, or the  
welfare of the whole family of mankind, I cannot consent to introduce slavery into any part of this  
continent which is now exempt from what seems to me so great an evil. These are my reasons for  
340 declining to compromise the question relating to slavery as a condition of the admission of  
California. . . .

And this brings me to the great all-absorbing argument that the Union is in danger of being  
dissolved, and that it can only be saved by compromise. I do not know what I would not do to save  
the Union; and therefore I shall bestow upon this subject a very deliberate consideration.

I do not overlook the fact that the entire delegation from the slave states, although they differ  
in regard to the details of the compromise proposed, and perhaps in regard to the exact  
circumstances of the crisis, seem to concur in this momentous warning. Nor do I doubt at all the  
patriotic devotion to the Union which is expressed by those from whom this warning proceeds. And  
350 yet, sir, although such warnings have been uttered with impassioned solemnity in my hearing every  
day for near three months, my confidence in the Union remains unshaken. I think they are to be

received with no inconsiderable distrust, because they are uttered under the influence of a controlling interest to be secured, a paramount object to be gained; and that is an equilibrium of power in the republic. I think they are to be received with even more distrust, because, with the most profound respect, they are uttered under an obviously high excitement. Nor is that excitement an unnatural one. It is a law of our nature that the passions disturb the reason and judgment just in proportion to the importance of the occasion, and the consequent necessity for calmness and candor. I think they are to be distrusted, because there is a diversity of opinion in regard to the nature and operation of this excitement. The senators from some states say that it has brought all parties in their  
360 own region into unanimity. The honorable senator from Kentucky [MR. CLAY] says that the danger lies in the violence of party spirit, and refers us for proof to the difficulties which attended the organization of the House of Representatives.

Sir, in my humble judgment, it is not the fierce conflict of parties that we are seeing and hearing; but, on the contrary, it is the agony of distracted parties—a convulsion resulting from the too narrow foundations of both the great parties, and of all parties—foundations laid in compromises of natural justice and of human liberty. A question, a moral question, transcending the too narrow creeds of parties, has arisen; the public conscience expands with it, and the green withes of party associations give way and break, and fall off from it. No, sir; it is not the state that is dying of the fever of party spirit. It is merely a paralysis of parties, premonitory however of their  
370 restoration, with new elements of health and vigor to be imbibed from that spirit of the age which is so justly called Progress.

Nor is the evil that of unlicensed, irregular, and turbulent faction. We are told that twenty legislatures are in session, burning like furnaces, heating and inflaming the popular passions. But these twenty legislatures are constitutional furnaces. They are performing their customary functions, imparting healthful heat and vitality while within their constitutional jurisdiction. If they rage beyond its limits, the popular passions of this country are not at all, I think, in danger of being inflamed to excess. No, sir; let none of these fires be extinguished. Forever let them burn and blaze. They are neither ominous meteors nor baleful comets, but planets; and bright and intense as their heat may be, it is their native temperature, and they must still obey the law which, by attraction  
380 toward this solar centre, holds them in their spheres.

I see nothing of that conflict between the southern and northern states, or between their representative bodies, which seems to be on all sides of me assumed. Not a word of menace, not a word of anger, not an intemperate word, has been uttered in the northern legislatures. They firmly

but calmly assert their convictions; but at the same time they assert their unqualified consent to submit to the common arbiter, and for weal or woe abide the fortunes of the Union.

390 What if there be less of moderation in the legislatures of the south? It only indicates on which side the balance is inclining, and that the decision of the momentous question is near at hand. I agree with those who say that there can be no peaceful dissolution—no dissolution of the Union by the secession of states; but that disunion, dissolution, happen when it may, will and must be revolution. I discover no omens of revolution. The predictions of the political astrologers do not agree as to the time or manner in which it is to occur. According to the authority of the honorable senator from Alabama [MR. CLEMENS], the event has already happened, and the Union is now in ruins. According to the honorable and distinguished senator from South Carolina [MR. CALHOUN], it is not to be immediate, but to be developed by time. . . .

400 I have thus endeavored to show that there is not now, and there is not likely to occur any adequate cause for revolution in regard to slavery. But you reply that, nevertheless, you must have guaranties; and the first one is for the surrender of fugitives from labor. That guaranty you cannot have, as I have already shown, because you cannot roll back the tide of social progress. You must be content with what you have. If you wage war against us, you can, at most, only conquer us, and then all you can get will be a treaty, and that you have already.

But you insist on a guaranty against the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, or war. Well, when you shall have declared war against us, what shall hinder us from immediately decreeing that slavery shall cease within the national capital?

410 You say that you will not submit to the exclusion of slaves from the new territories. What will you gain by resistance? Liberty follows the sword, although her sway is one of peace and beneficence. Can you propagate slavery then by the sword? You insist that you cannot submit to the freedom with which slavery is discussed in the free states. Will war—a war for slavery—arrest or even moderate that discussion? No, sir; that discussion will not cease; war will only inflame it to a greater height. It is a part of the eternal conflict between truth and error—between mind and physical force—the conflict of man against the obstacles which oppose his way to an ultimate and glorious destiny. It will go on until you shall terminate it in the only way in which any state or nation has ever terminated it—by yielding to it—yielding in your own time, and in your own manner, indeed, but nevertheless yielding to the progress of emancipation. You will do this, sooner

or later, whatever may be your opinion now; because nations which were prudent and humane, and wise as you are, have done so already.

Sir, the slave states have no reason to fear that this inevitable change will go too far or too fast for their safety or welfare. It cannot well go too fast or too far, if the only alternative is a war of races.

420 But it cannot go too fast. Slavery has a reliable and accommodating ally in a party in the free states, which, though it claims to be, and doubtless is in many respects, a party of progress, finds its sole security for its political power in the support and aid of slavery in the slave states. Of course, I do not include in that party those who are now cooperating in maintaining the cause of freedom against slavery. I am not of that party of progress which in the north thus lends its support to slavery. But it is only just and candid that I should bear witness to its fidelity to the interests of slavery.

Slavery has, moreover, a more natural alliance with the aristocracy of the north and with the aristocracy of Europe. So long as slavery shall possess the cotton-fields, the sugar-fields, and the rice-fields of the world, so long will commerce and capital yield it toleration and sympathy.

430 Emancipation is a democratic revolution. It is capital that arrests all democratic revolutions. It was capital, that, so recently in a single year, rolled back the tide of revolution from the base of the Carpathian mountains, across the Danube and the Rhine, into the streets of Paris. It is capital that is rapidly rolling back the throne of Napoleon into the chambers of the Tuilleries.

Slavery has a guaranty still stronger than these in the prejudices of caste and color, which induce even large majorities in all the free states to regard sympathy with the slave as an act of unmanly humiliation and self-abasement, although philosophy meekly expresses her distrust of the asserted natural superiority of the white race, and confidently denies that such a superiority, if justly claimed, could give a title to oppression.

440 There remains one more guaranty—one that has seldom failed you, and will seldom fail you hereafter. New states cling in closer alliance than older ones to the federal power. The concentration of the slave power enables you for long periods to control the federal government with the aid of the new states. I do not know the sentiments of the representatives from California; but, my word for it, if they should be admitted on this floor to-day, against your most obstinate opposition, they would, on all questions really affecting your interests, be found at your side.

With these alliances to break the force of emancipation, there will be no disunion and no secession. I do not say that there may not be disturbance, though I do not apprehend even that.

Absolute regularity and order in administration have not yet been established in any government, and unbroken popular tranquillity has not yet been attained in even the most advanced condition of human society. The machinery of our system is necessarily complex. A pivot may drop out here, a  
450 lever may be displaced there, a wheel may fall out of gearing elsewhere, but the machinery will soon recover its regularity, and move on just as before, with even better adaptation and adjustment to overcome new obstructions.

There are many well disposed persons who are alarmed at the occurrence of any such disturbance. The failure of a legislative body to organize is to their apprehension a fearful omen, and an extra constitutional assemblage to consult upon public affairs is with them cause for desperation. Even senators speak of the Union as if it existed only by consent, and, as it seems to be implied, by the assent of the legislatures of the states. On the contrary, the union was not founded in voluntary choice, nor does it exist by voluntary consent.

A union was proposed by the colonies by Franklin and others in 1754; but such was their  
460 aversion to an abridgment of their own importance, respectively, that it was rejected even under the pressure of a disastrous invasion by France.

A union of choice was proposed to the colonies in 1775; but so strong was their opposition, that they went through the war of independence without having established more than a mere council of consultation.

But with independence came enlarged interests of agriculture—absolutely new interests of manufactures—interests of commerce, of fisheries, of navigation, of a common domain, of common debts, of common revenues and taxation, of the administration of justice, of public defense, of public honor; in short, interests of common nationality and sovereignty—interests which at last compelled the adoption of a more perfect union—a National Government.

470 The genius, talents, and learning of Hamilton, of Jay, and of Madison, surpassing perhaps the intellectual power ever exerted before for the establishment of a government, combined with the serene but mighty influence of Washington, were only sufficient to secure the reluctant adoption of the Constitution that is now the object of all our affections and of the hopes of mankind. No wonder that the conflicts in which that Constitution was born, and the almost desponding solemnity of Washington, in his farewell address, impressed his countrymen and mankind with a profound distrust of its perpetuity! No wonder that while the murmurs of that day are yet ringing in our ears, we cherish that distrust, with pious reverence, as a national and patriotic sentiment!

But it is time to prevent the abuses of that sentiment. It is time to shake off that fear, for fear is always weakness. It is time to remember that government, even when it arises by chance or  
480 accident, and is administered capriciously and oppressively, is ever the strongest of all human institutions, surviving many social and ecclesiastical changes and convulsions; and that this Constitution of ours has all the inherent strength common to governments in general, and added to them has also the solidity and firmness derived from broader and deeper foundations in national justice, and a better civil adaptation to promote the welfare and happiness of mankind.

The Union, the creature of necessities, physical, moral, social, and political, endures by virtue of the same necessities; and these necessities are stronger than when it was produced—stronger by the six-fold increase of the society living under its beneficent protection—stronger by the augmentation ten thousand times of the fields, the workshops, the mines, and the ships, of that society; of its productions of the sea, of the plow, of the loom, and of the anvil, in their constant  
490 circle of internal and international exchange—stronger in the long rivers penetrating regions before unknown—stronger in all the artificial roads, canals, and other channels and avenues essential not only to trade but to defense—stronger in steam navigation, in steam locomotion on the land, and in telegraph communications, unknown when the Constitution was adopted—stronger in the freedom and in the growing empire of the seas—stronger in the element of national honor in all lands, and stronger than all in the now settled habits of veneration and affection for institutions so stupendous and so useful.

The Union, then, IS, not because merely that men choose that it shall be, but because some government must exist here, and no other government than this can. If it could be dashed to atoms by the whirlwind, the lightning, or the earthquake, today, it would rise again in all its just and  
500 magnificent proportions tomorrow. This nation is a globe, still accumulating upon accumulation, not a dissolving sphere.

[Speech continues]