

Sectional Crisis Speeches 1858

William H. Seward

Rochester, New York, 1858

5 Our country is a theatre, which exhibits, in full operation, two radically different political systems; the one resting on the basis of servile or slave labor, the other on voluntary labor of freemen. The laborers who are enslaved are all negroes. . . . But this is only accidental. The principle of the system is, that labor in every society, by whomsoever
10 performed, is necessarily unintellectual, grovelling and base; and that the laborer, equally for his own good and for the welfare of the State, ought to be enslaved. . . .

Hitherto, the two systems have existed in different States, . . . but these antagonistic systems are continually coming into closer contact,
15 and collision results. . . . Shall I tell you what this collision means? They who think that it is accidental, unnecessary, the work of interested or fanatical agitators, and therefore ephemeral, mistake the case altogether. It is an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces, and it means that the United States must, and will, sooner
20 or later, become either entirely a slaveholding nation, or entirely a free-labor nation.

James Henry Hammond

Speech to the U.S. Senate (1858)

In all social systems there must be a class to do the menial duties,
25 to perform the drudgery of life. That is, a class requiring but a low order of intellect and but little skill. Its requisites are vigor, docility, fidelity. Such a class you must have, or you would not have that other class which leads to progress, civilization, and refinement. It constitutes the very mud-sill of society and of political government;
30 and you might as well attempt to build a house in the air, as to build either the one or the other, except on this mud-sill. Fortunately for the South, she found a race adapted to that purpose to her hand. A race inferior to her own, but eminently qualified in temper, in vigor, in docility, in capacity to stand the climate, to answer all her
35 purposes. We use them for our purpose, and call them slaves. . . . I will not characterize that class* at the North by that term, but you have it; it is there; it is everywhere; it is eternal.

* Hammond means the "mud-sill" class of laborers referred to above.

*Abraham Lincoln**Springfield, Illinois, 1858*

40 We are not far into the fifth year since a policy was initiated with the
avowed object, and confident promise, of putting an end to slavery
agitation.[†] Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not
only not ceased, but has constantly augmented. "A house divided
against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure
45 permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be
dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will
cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.

[†] Lincoln refers here to the Kansas-Nebraska Act and its principle of "popular sovereignty."