

The Road to Civil War

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James Henry Hammond of South Carolina served as a United States Representative from 1835 to 1836, Governor of South Carolina from 1842 to 1844, and United States Senator from 1857 to 1860.

He was a major proponent in defense of slavery. In a speech to the US Senate in 1858 Hammond said, "In all social systems there must be a class to do the menial duties, 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 progress, civilization, and refinement. It constitutes the very mud-sill of society and of political government; 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 purposes. We use them for our purpose and call them slaves." (1)

Hammond went also argued the economic superiority of the South, "England would topple headlong and carry the whole civilized world with her, save the South. No, you dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton is king." (2)

In 1860, Hammond wrote in a letter to Francis Lieber, "So far as I know, and as I believe, every man in both houses is armed with a revolver – some with two—and a bowie-knife. It is, I fear, in the power of any Red or Black Republican (3) to precipitate at any moment a collision in which the slaughter would be such as to shock the world and dissolve this government. I have done, ever since I have been here, all I could to avert such a catastrophe. But, I tell you, knowing all about it here, that unless the aggression on the slaveholder is arrested, no power, short of God's, can prevent a bloody fight here, and a disruption of the Union." (4)

(1) Selections from the Letters and Speeches of the Hon. James H. Hammond, of South Carolina, John F. Trow & Co., New York, 1866, pp. 318-319.

(2) *ibid*, p. 317.

(3) The term, Red Republican, was used to refer Republicans with socialist or communist principles, that is, those who wished to eliminate slavery and thereby, as seen by the slave owners, confiscate their property and spread democracy. The term, Black Republican, was used to refer to abolitionist Republicans. Both terms were pejorative.

(4) The Life and Letters of Francis Lieber, James R. Osgood & Company, Boston, 1882, p. 310.