

President James Buchanan, fourth annual message to Congress (December 3, 1860)

". . . All for which the slave States have ever contended, is to be let alone and permitted to manage their domestic institutions in their own way: As sovereign States, they, and they alone, are responsible before God and the world for the slavery existing among them. . . .

"The Southern States, standing on the basis of the Constitution, have a right to demand this act of justice from the States of the North. Should it be refused, then the Constitution, to which all the States are parties, will have been willfully violated by one portion of them in a provision essential to the domestic security and happiness of the remainder. In that event the injured States, after having first used all peaceful and constitutional means to obtain redress, would be justified in revolutionary resistance to the Government of the Union. . . .

"The question fairly stated is, Has the Constitution delegated to Congress the power to coerce a State into submission which is attempting to withdraw or has actually withdrawn from the Confederacy? If answered in the affirmative, it must be on the principle that the power has been conferred upon Congress to declare and to make war against a State. After much serious reflection I have arrived at the conclusion that no such power has been delegated to Congress. . . .

"Congress can contribute much to avert [Southern withdrawal from the Union] by proposing and recommending to the legislatures of the several States the remedy for existing evils which the Constitution has itself provided for its own preservation. . . . an 'explanatory amendment' of the Constitution on the subject of slavery. . . .

1. An express recognition of the right of property in slaves in the States where it now exists or may hereafter exist.
2. The duty of protecting this right in all the common Territories. . . .
3. A like recognition of the right of the master to have his slave who has escaped from one State to another restored. . . .

"In any event, [such an explanatory amendment] ought to be tried in a spirit of conciliation before any of these States shall separate themselves from the Union."

Jeff Davis on Secession

Confederate President Jefferson Davis, Message to the Confederate Congress (April 29, 1861)

"It was by the delegates chosen by the several States . . . that the Constitution of the United States was framed in 1787 and submitted to the several States for ratification. . . . [These] States endeavored in every possible form to exclude the idea that the separate and independent sovereignty of each State was merged into one common government and nation, and . . . to impress on the Constitution its true character-that of a compact between independent States.

". . . Amendments were added to the Constitution placing beyond any pretense of doubt the reservation by the States of all their sovereign rights and powers not expressly delegated to the United States by the Constitution.

"Strange, indeed. . . . [the Constitution has] proved unavailing to prevent the rise and growth in the Northern States of a political school which has persistently claimed that the government thus formed was not a compact between States, but was in effect a national government, set up above and over the States.