

The Destiny of the Slave States*

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James Dunwoody Brownson DeBow was the founder and editor of the highly influential DeBow's Review, which he published on and off from 1846 until his death in 1867. DeBow was an advocate of Southern development and industrialization. He would become a secessionist, and an ardent supporter of the Davis administration during the war. The Review, published in New Orleans, promoted the South's "agricultural, commercial, and industrial progress." By the start of the Civil War, it was the most widely circulated periodical in the South.

We are at a critical juncture in public affairs. The world is moving forward with enterprise and progress such as has never been before conceived of. Nearly \$200,000,000 are being added annually to the gold currency of the world. The whole resources of Australia, California and China, with its 300,000,000 of people, and with more accumulated capital and wealth than any one nation, have been heretofore locked up from the rest of mankind. . . . [The resulting trade will] produce a change in the distribution of wealth, equal to that produced by the discovery of America upon Spain and Europe. Where is all this vast trade and accumulation in gold to pass through the channels of commerce into the exchanges of the world? It must concentrate upon the Pacific coast and force its way across the Isthmus of Panama into the Gulf of Mexico, and thence into the Atlantic, that great reservoir basin for the civilized nations of the earth. The Atlantic will be to the world what the Mediterranean was to the [Roman] world

[T]he Gulf of Mexico lies between the great region drained by the Amazon on one side and the Mississippi on the other. These are the two greatest valleys upon the face of the earth, and capable of the greatest productions. It is not saying too much to say that if properly developed, they are capable of producing what is produced at present by the whole civilized world. The former is almost in a state of nature, and the latter is not yet half developed. The whole country between these two mighty rivers presents the most wonderful region now to be settled up by the enterprise and genius of man. In the progress of the next fifty years, the commerce and trade that must concentrate upon the Gulf of Mexico, will far exceed anything that man heretofore dreamed of in his wildest imaginations. The Island of Cuba, from its central position, and its great port of Havana,

is the key to all this. The nation that holds Cuba will hold control over the commerce and wealth of this new world.

It is not saying too much to say that if we hold Cuba, in the next fifty years we will hold the destiny of the richest and most increased commerce that ever dazzled the cupidity of man. And with that commerce we can control the power of the world. Give us this, and we can make the public opinion of the world. These two great valleys of the Amazon and the Mississippi are now possessed by two governments of the earth, most deeply interested in African slavery-- Brazil and the United States. Cast your eye over the map, and see their vast capacity for production. While the Mississippi, with its tributaries, can carry to market more of the necessaries and breadstuffs of life than any portion of the habitable globe, the Amazon can float the wealth of nations upon its bosom in the production of the tropics--the whole intermediate countries between these two great valleys, including the West India Islands, is a region under the plastic hand of a beneficent Providence teeming with the fatness of the richest and most luxuriant productions. In its infancy, and as to capacity to produce, it is, as it were, unknown to the world. Most of it has slumbered for ages in solitary grandeur. How is it to be developed?

Think you the Caucasian race can stand to toil and labor under the burning rays of a tropical sun, and sleep in vigor and prosperity under the miasma of its exuberant and mighty plains and swamps? No! Its resources are to be finally and fully developed by that race which God in his mercy formed and created for just such regions. Providence lots off the earth to its appropriate races. The camel loves the arid air of Arabia, and the reindeer loves the frozen hills of Lapland. So, in like manner, the black man loves to breathe the humid air of his native swamps, while the white man exults and bounds in the elastic air of his native hills. Where you can combine the administrative governing qualities of the one race together with the patient endurance and physical capacities for low altitudes of the other, you have--that perfect system by which the vast tropical regions of the earth are to be developed. Whilst the laboring strata of society is occupied by one race, suited to its exposures, give the other race such a position as will enable them to preserve themselves from those daily and exhausting exposures under which the white race will sink in the tropics. Puling and sickly philanthropy may preach a different doctrine, but, if practiced, it will forever consign to a barbarian wilderness some of the fairest portions of the world.

Witness the miserable experiment made by the English and French in the West Indies. Twenty-five years ago, where we saw cultivation bringing forth wealth and refinement with all the elegance of polished life, we see vagrant labor stalking through a desolate land, with hungry and brutal ferocity. This experiment of West India

emancipation is worth a thousand theories, and is fast enlightening the reflecting parts of mankind. England feels in its consequences her folly. Everything has taken place exactly as the Duke of Wellington. predicted it would in his clear and manly speech against the act of emancipation at the time.

The African race, under a system of domestic servitude, tempered by the principles of Christianity, are themselves raised and benefited in the scale of civilization. The great mass of the poor and needy in all portions of the colder and prolific latitudes, require for their comfort, sugar, coffee, rice, and cotton, and the luxurious productions of tropical regions. When they exchange their labors for these products at cheap rates, it tends to raise themselves in the scale of civilization, by administering to their wants and comforts, and thus tempting them to industry and enterprise, in order that they may be able to enjoy the advantages of various climates. This system acts and reacts upon the different branches of the human family so as mutually to benefit and bless all by diffusing more equally the comforts of life.

Hence, it is that these productions of slave labor, cotton, by which an abundant and cheap article for clothing the poor and needy, has done more to elevate the great masses, and spread civilization to the lower ranks of society, than all the other causes put-together in modern times. So now, if the noble regions to which we have alluded above, were reduced to systematic culture by African labor, governed by the energy and intelligence of the white man, they would more than quadruple the present productions of the comforts and luxuries of life, to diffuse them amongst the poor and needy of the higher latitudes of the earth, and thus mutually benefit and bless both regions. This is the true progress of civilization. And it is thus that Providence ever works upon the destinies of men. Apparent evils are the greatest blessings. It is by war you conquer the barbarian race, and by slavery you reduce them to labor and the arts of civilized life. Slavery and war have thus been the two great forerunners of civilization. This modern crusade and pharisaical declamation against domestic servitude will run out, as did the fanatical crusades of old, and society will again resume its reason and common sense, as the best guides in the practical affairs of life.

If we have wisdom and enlightened statesmanship to direct our country, we can turn back the tide, and by successful and triumphant experiment, make a public opinion for modern times. Everything is at present on a most critical turn in Europe. The Emperor of the French [Napoleon III] stands upon a mine that may explode any day. A convulsion there, or in Turkey, would shake the world. [(A reference to the Crimean War.)]

. . . . The true policy of our government, at present, is to stand still, but be prepared to strike if it can be done successfully. If Europe is thrown into confusion, all American affairs will inevitably fall under our control. We must do nothing to hasten events. Time is doing its work for us

A general rupture in Europe would force upon us the undisputed sway of the Gulf of Mexico and the West Indies, with all their rich and mighty productions. Guided by our genius and enterprise, a new world would rise there, as it did before under the genius of Columbus. With Cuba and St. Domingo, we could control the productions of the tropics, and with them the commerce of the world, and with that the power of the world.

The world will fall back upon African labor, governed and owned in some shape or form by the white man, as it has always been. This is the only system which can reduce to thorough cultivation the mighty regions of the Amazon and the great tropical valleys of the Gulf of Mexico. The world will have to choose between that and its remaining an everlasting wilderness. Under African labor, properly owned, the poor and the needy of the more rigid climates of the earth will be enabled to receive and enjoy the comforts and the blessings of its necessary and luxurious productions. Under this system, the industrious but poor laborers of Northern climates can be enabled to enjoy the coffee, rice, sugar, and cotton for cheap clothes, from regions where, if they were compelled to toil and work for it, under the burning rays of a tropical sun, they would sink and perish away.

But England complains of the humanity of such a system! And this is that England, the iron heel of whose power had but recently crushed the Irishman into the dust of the earth upon his native soil, and whose gigantic and bloody footsteps upon the plains of India have made whole empires groan and travail under the most heartless and grinding slavery that the indignation of man has ever painted. Such complaints from such quarter is the most arrant hypocrisy and sanctimonious impudence the world has ever witnessed.

And are we, a great people moved forward in the progress of empire, to be duped by such canting sentimentalities as this? If we are, then will we deserve to wear the yoke of England again. If she has lost the absolute sway of the scepter over us, she can restore her through her preaching and this mock humanity of her ethereal and sublimated morality.

No! we have a higher destiny than this to fulfil. We, too, are in the hands of a superintending Providence, to work out the real regeneration of mankind. Take the earth that God has given us, and by labor and industry suited to it, make every portion of it bloom and blossom as a garden to the peace of man. But the objection is often urged that

there is danger in extending our territories, and adding new people in our progress. Whether for good or for evil, it is vain to oppose it. Our destiny is onward, until many more rich and prolific regions are to be warped under the broad folds of our national banner. . . . Cautious conservatism may declaim against it, but it will be of no avail. As well might you attempt to turn the angry wave of the Mississippi, by stretching wickerwork across it. The great duty of the statesman is to direct it into proper channels, and let it flow on without eruption, if possible.

In a few years there will be no investment for the two hundred millions in the annual increase of gold, on a large scale, so profitable, and so necessary, as the development and cultivation of the tropical regions, now slumbering in rank and wild luxuriance.

If the slaveholding race in these States are but true to themselves, they have a great destiny before them. . . . All we want is wisdom and thorough statesmanship to guide and direct us, and we may yet be a chosen people for great and wise purposes.