

Speech on Preserving the Union
Henry Clay Excerpt 1850

Mr. President, I have said that I want to know whether we are bound together by a rope of sand or an effective capable government competent to enforce the powers therein vested by the Constitution of the United States. And what is this doctrine of Nullification, set up again, revived, resuscitated, neither enlarged nor improved, nor expanded in this new edition of it, that when a single state shall undertake to say that a law passed by the twenty-nine states is unconstitutional and void, she may raise the standards of resistance and defy the twenty-nine. Sir, I denied that doctrine twenty years ago—I deny it now—I will die denying it. There is no such principle. . . .

The Honorable Senator speaks of Virginia being my country. This Union is my country. The thirty states is my country. Kentucky is my country. And Virginia no more than any of the other states of this Union. She has created on my part obligations and feelings and duties toward her in my private character which nothing upon earth could induce me to forfeit or violate. But even if it were my own state—if my own state, contrary to her duty, should raise the standard of disunion against the residue of the Union, I would go against her, I would go against Kentucky in that contingency as much as I love her.

Nor am I to be alarmed or dissuaded from any such course by intimations of the spilling of blood. If blood is to be spilt by whose fault is it to be spilt? Upon the supposition, I maintain it would be the fault of those who raised the standard of disunion and endeavored to prostrate this government, and, Sir, when that is done, as long as it please God to give me voice to express my sentiments, or an arm, weak and enfeebled as it may be by age, that voice and that arm will be on the side of my country, for the support of the general authority, and for the maintenance of the power of this Union.