

John C. Calhoun: Pro Slavery

"Slavery a Positive Good," speech to U.S. Senate, 1837.

John C. Calhoun was vice president of the United States (1825-32) and U.S. senator from South Carolina for most of the period from 1832 to 1850.

He called for secession from the Union. Known as the "Father of Secession".

We of the South will not, cannot, surrender our institutions [slavery]. To maintain the existing relations between the two races..... is indispensable to the peace and happiness of both. . . .

But let me not be understood as admitting, even by implication, that the existing relations between the two races in the slaveholding States is an evil--far otherwise; I hold it to be a good, as it has thus far proved itself to be to both, and will continue to prove so if not disturbed by the fell spirit of abolition. I appeal to facts. Never before has the black race of Central Africa, from the dawn of history to the present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually.....

But I take higher ground. I hold that in the present state of civilization, where two races of different origin, and distinguished by color, and other physical differences, as well as intellectual, are brought together, the relation now existing in the slaveholding States between the two, is, instead of an evil, a good--a positive good..... I hold then, that there never has yet existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the community did not, in point of fact, live on the labor of the other. Broad and general as is this assertion, it is fully borne out by history.

I may say with truth, that in few countries so much is left to the share of the laborer (slave), and so little exacted from him, or where there is more kind attention paid to him in sickness or infirmities of age. Compare his condition with the tenants of the poor houses in the more civilized portions of Europe—look at the sick, and the old and infirm slave, on one hand, in the midst of his family and friends, under the kind superintending care of his master and mistress, and compare it with the forlorn and wretched condition of the pauper in the poorhouse...
[slaves have it better than the poor people of Europe]

In a political essay, A Disquisition on Government.

These great and dangerous errors have their origin in the prevalent opinion that all men are born free and equal; ...than which nothing can be more unfounded and false. [He claims slaves are not born free and equal]

Friendly Questions:

1. Why do you believe that slavery is a positive good?
2. You said slavery is necessary for the peace and happiness of not only the slave but for the white man. Can you explain yourself?

Unfriendly Questions:

1. You claim that slavery made the black man civilized. Could America help the black man improve his life without making them slaves?
2. Doesn't the Declaration of Independence state that all men are created equal?