

# Slavery a Positive Good

**John C. Calhoun (Speech to the US Senate)**

**February 06, 1837**

*This is a portion of John C. Calhoun's speech to the US Senate in 1837. The true focus of the speech is to argue against abolition (freeing slaves). This argument is in the first half of the speech, which I removed. The excerpt below support arguments for slavery, and explains why, according to Calhoun, slavery is good and necessary.*

...

Be it good or bad, [slavery] has grown up with our society and institutions, and is so interwoven with them that to destroy it would be to destroy us as a people. 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 feel myself called upon to speak freely upon the subject where the honor and interests of those I represent are involved. 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. This is not the proper occasion, but, if it were, it would not be difficult to trace the various devices by which the wealth of all civilized communities has been so unequally divided, and to show by what means so small a share has been allotted to those by whose labor it was produced, and so large a share given to the non-producing classes. The devices are almost innumerable, from the brute force and gross superstition of ancient times, to the subtle and artful fiscal contrivances of modern. I might well challenge a comparison between them and the more direct, simple, and patriarchal mode by which the labor of the African race is, among us, commanded by the European. I may say with truth, that in few countries so much is left to the share of the laborer, 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.

What reasons does Senator Calhoun argue slavery is good and necessary?

According to Senator Calhoun, why is slavery better than being a poor European tenant?

“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.” Explain this statement.

“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, ...” What does Calhoun imply by “intellectual [differences]?”