

“Slavery: A Positive Good” **John C. Calhoun**

1 However sound the great body of the non-slaveholding States are at present, in the course of a few years they
2 will be succeeded by those who will have been taught to hate the people and institutions of nearly one-half of this Union,
3 with a hatred more deadly than one hostile nation ever entertained towards another. It is easy to see the end. By the
4 necessary course of events, if left to themselves, we must become, finally, two people.

5 It is impossible under the deadly hatred which must spring up between the two great nations, if the present
6 causes are permitted to operate unchecked, that we should continue under the same political system. The conflicting
7 elements would burst the Union asunder, powerful as are the links which hold it together. Abolition and the Union cannot
8 coexist. As the friend of the Union I openly proclaim it--and the sooner it is known the better. The former may now be
9 controlled, but in a short time it will be beyond the power of man to arrest the course of events.

10 We of the South will not, cannot, surrender our institutions. To maintain the existing relations between the two
11 races, inhabiting that section of the Union, is indispensable to the peace and happiness of both. It cannot be subverted
12 without drenching the country or the other of the races. . . . But let me not be understood as admitting, even by
13 implication, that the existing relations between the two races in the slaveholding States is an evil:--far otherwise; I hold it
14 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
15 abolition. I appeal to facts. Never before has the black race of Central Africa, from the dawn of history to the present day,
16 attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually.

17 In the meantime, the white or European race, has not degenerated. It has kept pace with its brethren in other
18 sections of the Union where slavery does not exist. It is odious to make comparison; but I appeal to all sides whether the
19 South is not equal in virtue, intelligence, patriotism, courage, disinterestedness, and all the high qualities which adorn our
20 nature. But I take higher ground. I hold that in the present state of civilization, where two races of different origin, and
21 distinguished by color, and other physical differences, as well as intellectual, are brought together, the relation now
22 existing in the slaveholding States between the two, is, instead of an evil, a good--a positive good.

23 I feel myself called upon to speak freely upon the subject where the honor and interests of those I represent are
24 involved. I hold then, that there never has yet existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the

25 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
26 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
27 the wealth of all civilized communities has been so unequally divided, and to show by what means so small a share has
28 been allotted to those by whose labor it was produced, and so large a share given to the non-producing classes. The
29 devices are almost innumerable, from the brute force and gross superstition of ancient times, to the subtle and artful
30 fiscal contrivances of modern. I might well challenge a comparison between them and the more direct, simple, and
31 patriarchal mode by which the labor of the African race is, among us, commanded by the European.

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

37 But I will not dwell on this aspect of the question; I turn to the political; and here I fearlessly assert that the
38 existing relation between the two races in the South, against which these blind fanatics are waging war, forms the most
39 solid and durable foundation on which to rear free and stable political institutions. It is useless to disguise the fact. There
40 is and always has been in an advanced stage of wealth and civilization, a conflict between labor and capital. The
41 condition of society in the South exempts us from the disorders and dangers resulting from this conflict; and which
42 explains why it is that the political condition of the slaveholding States has been so much more stable and quiet than that
43 of the North. . . .

44 Surrounded as the slaveholding States are with such imminent perils, I rejoice to think that our means of
45 defense are ample, if we shall prove to have the intelligence and spirit to see and apply them before it is too late. All we
46 want is concert, to lay aside all party differences and unite with zeal and energy in repelling approaching dangers. Let
47 there be concert of action, and we shall find ample means of security without resorting to secession or disunion. I speak
48 with full knowledge and a thorough examination of the subject, and for one see my way clearly. . . .

49 I dare not hope that anything I can say will arouse the South to a due sense of danger; I fear it is beyond the
50 power of mortal voice to awaken it in time from the fatal security into which it has fallen.