

Note: John C. Calhoun was Vice President of the United States (1825-1832) and served as U.S. Senator from South Carolina. In this speech, he argues slavery is positive for everyone.

CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS: LESSON 2: HANDOUT 4A: CALHOUN SPEECH

JOHN C. CALHOUN, "SLAVERY A POSITIVE GOOD," SPEECH TO U.S. SENATE, 1837.¹

He says that in a few years, the Northern and Southern states will grow to completely hate one another over their differences.

However sound the great body of the non-slaveholding States are at present, in the course of a few years they will be succeeded by those who will have been taught to hate the people and institutions of nearly one-half of this Union, with a hatred more deadly than one hostile nation ever entertained towards another. It is easy to see the end.

By the necessary course of events, if left to themselves, we must become, finally, two people. It is impossible under the deadly hatred which must spring up between the two great nations, if the present causes are permitted to operate unchecked, that we should continue under the same political system. The conflicting elements would burst the Union asunder, powerful as are the links which hold it together. **Abolition and the Union cannot coexist.**

He says that the Union must split before the hatred between the North and the South results in death. The South cannot exist within the Union if slavery is abolished.

Here, Calhoun says that the South cannot give up slavery. If slavery was abolished, it would not only hurt the country but those who were enslaved.

He says that slavery is not evil; it remains positive for both races.

As the friend of the Union I openly proclaim it,- and the sooner it is known the better. The former may now be controlled, but in a short time it will be beyond the power of man to arrest the course of events. **We of the South will not, cannot, surrender our institutions. To maintain the existing relations between the two races, inhabiting that section of the Union, is indispensable to the peace and happiness of both. It cannot be subverted without drenching the country or the other of the races. . . .**

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

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Calhoun claims that slavery is an improvement and better position than what the African would have had in his own country.
He also says that the condition of the Southern White race has not regressed, or gotten worse. Southern Whites are equal to Northern Whites in all American characteristics.

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. In the meantime, the white or European race, has not degenerated.**

It has kept pace with its brethren in other sections of the Union where slavery does not exist. It is odious to make comparison; but I appeal to all sides whether the South is not equal in virtue, intelligence, patriotism, courage, disinterestedness, and all the high qualities which adorn our nature. **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.**

Calhoun claims that the White and Black races are different not only physically but intellectually, suggesting that Black people are not as smart as White people. Therefore, the existing system of social relations is positive for everyone.
He further claims that there has never been a wealthy society in which one group of people did not depend on another for work and labor. Therefore, he suggests that in order to maintain a civilized society, slavery must continue to exist.