

# Fitzhugh and his defence in cannibals all philosophy essay



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George Fitzhugh, in his defense of slavery in *Cannibals All!* represents a truly conservative ideology. Fitzhugh articulates the necessity of slavery as an absolute good, not merely a political reality. In doing so, Fitzhugh decries the supposed better lives of free laborers by attacking the notions of natural right and liberty and the belief in consent of the governed. Fitzhugh reverts to an Aristotelian view of natural inequalities: some men are meant to be slaves and others to be masters, and praises slavery and feudalism as a benefit for both the aristocracy and the masses.

Fitzhugh represents an attack on the basic principles of modern liberalism, as well as a rejection of the new 'isms' of his day (notably socialism and abolitionism), which would lead to the abandonment of all social institutions (marriage, government, etc). Fitzhugh embraces Aristotle's concept of the origins of government, and rejects the Lockean social contract (6-13).

Fitzhugh further rejects the institutions of the North and praises the institution of slavery throughout the south.

### Aristotelian

Fitzhugh prefers Aristotelian, classical political theory to modern, liberal political thought. Fitzhugh asserts that inequality and slavery is natural: i. e. that aristocracy is a natural institution. Some men are better than others; equality is a fraudulent concept. Fitzhugh rejects any notion of natural liberty, as there was no state of nature outside civil society. Hobbes, Locke and the liberal tradition are wrong: there is no state of nature, men do not exist individually, but only in society. Government are always instituted by force, not by consent; there is no social contract.

Men are by nature social, as Aristotle states, thus there is no such thing as a state of nature absent society. Thus, there is no natural right, men only exist under the rule of government and society. Government are not made by consent, as Locke claims, but by ? birth and nature?. Restrictions on liberty exist to ? preserve the human hive.? Liberty does not exist in the civil society either; men are ruled by government for ? security.? Liberty is neither attainable nor desirable (71-78). Liberty leads men to harm others just to ? be just to himself? ? but men are not selfish, but social, longing for social institutions (228). Fitzhugh affirms that man is by nature social and loves first his family, then his slaves, then his countrymen (36).

Fitzhugh denies the principle of the Declaration that government ? derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.? Only the elites were consulted in forming the government ? all governments are instituted by force and continued by force. Good republics are governed by a small group of elites ? much as the southern states are governed. Only a limited few in North are truly granted consent ? consent government is the equal of anarchy (243-246).

### Slavery Good

Following Aristotelian and classical premises, certain men are by nature superior ? they are meant to rule and be masters. The mass of men are meant to be slaves. Any notion of equality is false, men are not by nature equal, some men have genius while most men mediocre. This is certainly true when comparing whites to Negroes, or when comparing laborers to capitalists. The purpose of society is to provide not liberty, which ensures the

destruction of men in a Hobbesian state of war, but to provide security to men, which demands a state of slaver.

Only a handful of men are meant to rule; the notion of self-government has been tossed out the window ? the masses are not fit to rule, or even to be consulted as to rule. Men of genius are fit to command, the masses are meant for imitation and slavery; mediocrity must be ? chained down?. ? Liberty for the few, slavery for the masses? (63). Elites should rule, and impose strict restrictions on liberty for the protection of society. Elites certainly possess liberty ? the liberty to govern men to provide for their best interests. The ruling class takes upon themselves the making of all decisions as to the best interest of the people. Men have a natural right to be ? taken care of and protected? ? i. e. to be slaves. Only one man in twenty is fit ? for liberty and command? (67-69)

It is the duty of society to protect the weak; thus it is the duty of society to enslave the weak. Blacks are weak because they lack the means to support themselves in infirmity, and that they lack the wits and abilities to survive in free competition (187). Liberty is a terrible thing for blacks; they must be protected by the institution of slavery. The competitive, individualistic state of nature a state of war and the masses are not fit for competition. Inferior men must be protected by elites, this can only be done when they submit all their ? liberty? to masters ? that is, submit to slavery. Scripture supports slavery, recognizing that slavery is ? promotive of men? s happiness and well-being?, and instills morality (30). Slavery is a police institution, protecting slaves from the tyranny of husbands and parents. The Bible defends the institution of white slavery, thus it must be either untrue, or else <https://assignbuster.com/fitzhugh-and-his-defence-in-cannibals-all-philosophy-essay/>

slavery is an absolute good and not a violation of natural liberty (if such a thing even exists). Fitzhugh supports the notion that slavery is an absolute good. Slavery serves to make men moral and intelligent, and is preserved by a love of the slave for his master and the master for his slave. Slavery promotes the good of the slaves, because masters love their slaves as they love their families; whereas there is no such attachment among laborers and capitalists (200-206). A society based upon slavery is necessary to protect men from a Hobbesian ? war of all against all?; liberty is undesirable as it will bring harm to the weak (218-19). Slavery serves the best interest of the slaves ? a society based on liberty and competition would overwhelm them, much worse than a kind, loving master would. Elite masters will protect, teach, and ensure the morals of the masses.

Poor better off in Aristocracy/Feudalism than Liberalism

Fitzhugh teaches that the feudal state was superior to the modern state in protecting the interests of the masses ? i. e. the poor. He believes Southern society is akin to the feudal society, and thus superior to the Northern way of doing things.

The Reformation, in trying to grant liberty to the mass, in reality harmed the poor. The institutions of aristocracy, feudalism, and church power over land protected the poor and provided them ? true liberty.? By attacking these institutions, the reformers ? impaired the moral, spiritual, and physical well-being? of the masses (107). ? There was no pauperism in Europe until feudal slavery was abolished? (210). Feudal lords protected their serfs and provided for their needs. In the modern state, competition leads to nothing but the

oppression of the weak by the strong. The rise of modern science teaches that men have a right to private judgment; this leads to the concept of human individuality and to the notion of a social contract. Doctrines of Laissez-Faire, free speech and press, human equality, and liberty of action descend from this notion. This philosophy results in ? the supreme sovereignty of the individual, and the abnegation of government? (53). All power is deferred from government to individual men; given Fitzhugh's view of natural elites, it is his contention that the few will dominate, and destroy, the many.

Fitzhugh decries the abolitionist movement as in favor of abolishing all institutions, not just slavery, in favor of individual rule. Abolitionism means the abolition of government, of marriage, of family, of church, and of property (85). It is this characterization of abolitionism that demonstrates ? the failure of free society?, thus free institutions, liberty under law, does nothing to promote the public good (99-100). The right of private judgment leads to the institution of ? no government (132). ? All modern philosophy converges to a single point ? the overthrow of all government? (190). Liberty demands the end of private property; the socialists recognize that this is the logical end to modern liberalism ? they are either right, and all must be abolished, or liberalism is wrong and liberty is undesirable (222). Fitzhugh, as stated previously, believes the latter; liberty is destructive of security for the masses. Only elites should be granted liberty ? the liberty to rule over and enslave the masses in order to protect them.

Comparison of North and South

Having demonstrated that modern liberalism is based on flawed logic, and that slavery is an absolute good, Fitzhugh seeks to demonstrate that Southern institutions are superior to Northern capitalism. In the South, slaves are well provided for by kindly, loving masters, while in the North, wage labor is treated appallingly by wealthy elites. That is, he has first attacked the ideology behind Northern thought, and is now attacking the institutions of the North, in defense of Southern slavery.

Southern slavery is superior to Northern capitalism. Slaves ? keep more of the products of their labor? than wage laborers; and slave masters care for the needs of slaves far beyond what capitalist ever would do. White ? slave-holding? is characterized by making others work for you, and paying as little as possible; while Southern slave masters work ? as hard as their slaves.? Negro slaves are happier and freer than wage-laborers; northern whites are slaves to money, their liberty limited by their need for wages. The northern capitalist views ill treatment of labor as a ? moral good? and thus cannibalism is the name of the game. Slave masters do not enjoy the luxury of northern capitalists; they must labor with their slaves to preserve their estates. Slave masters protect and improve the conditions of the slaves, by ? enforcing morality? and educating them by merely being around them (15-30). Men are happier in slave states than in the North; they are well cared for and not starving (234). Fitzhugh? s contention is that Southern slave masters must work to maintain their estates; as slaves are part of their household, their interests lie in the protection and well being of slaves. The natural relationship of master and slave is similar to that of the family, masters are loving toward their slaves ? which is evident in the kindness of Southern

slave masters. Northern capitalists desire nothing but to profit by the exploitation of laborers. Southern slave masters exhibit kindness for the slaves, educate them and teach them morals, and protect them as any natural aristocrat would.

Fitzhugh's analysis of the Southern slave holder, or of Northern capitalism, may not be an accurate portrayal of 19th century life, but it is based more on political theory than on current events. Fitzhugh maintains that natural aristocrats, elites blessed with superior wisdom and abilities, must govern the mass of men for their own protection. Self-government and liberty harm the masses and undermine security; liberty is reserved for the elites, aristocratic institutions are superior to democratic. Slavery is justified, not as a necessary evil, but an absolute good, as slavery allows masters to protect and provide for the well-being of slaves. Northern capitalism, based on liberal traditions, exploits the masses, and has failed. The only progress for liberalism is, as socialists and abolitionists advocate, the destruction of government, property, family, and all institutions ? which will only lead to greater oppression. The only solution is slavery ? allowing elites to rule over slaves.

This serves in sharp contrast to Lincoln, who holds the Declaration and the principles of Locke and the founding fathers as absolutely good. Slavery is evil in that it denies equality and liberty to all men. Slavery has been tolerated only as a necessary evil. Freedom is always preferable to freedom, regardless of intellectual ability.

Lincoln

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Abraham Lincoln's speeches and public documents can best be characterized by two key tendencies. First, Lincoln, in the wake of radicals (such as Fitzhugh) in the South and in the North in abolitionists, takes a position that is both moderate, and based on pragmatic concerns. Second, and building upon his pragmatism, Lincoln points to the principles of the founding fathers, i. e. the spirit of the Declaration of Independence, and the supremacy of the Constitution in justifying his positions.

Lincoln's proposed limits on the expansion of slavery into territories is a moderate position; based on his resistance to abolition ? both for practical reasons and because of the views of the founders, and his view that slavery is a wrong ? based on the principle of equality and natural right espoused in the Declaration. Lincoln's approach to the slavery issue, and the preservation of the Union, demonstrate his belief in moderate, gradual, and legal approaches to the problems, as well as his utmost commitment to the ideals of the framers of the Constitution.

#### Spirit of Founders ? Liberty and Equality

Lincoln believes that the US is a truly great experiment that will demonstrate that a people can govern themselves. To demonstrate the success of such principles, the Union must be preserved. (Address to Young Men's Lyceum, 1838). Slavery undermines the example of the notion of self-government, denying the republicanism of US institutions to a substantial proportion of the population. Both enemies of free institutions and true advocates of freedom will point to the US example as hypocritical (Speech on Kansas-Nebraska Act, 1854). No founding father denied that the Negro was to be

included in the Declaration of Independence. ? Inferior races? are equal in regard to natural rights (Fifth Lincoln Douglas Debate, 1858).

Lincoln believes strongly that the privileges of government, and the notion of self-government should be extended to all who pay taxes or serve ? i. e. all white men and women (Letter to the Sangamo Journal, 1836). Lincoln mocks the view of Stephen Douglas and other Democrats on their notion of self-government. Lincoln claims self-government is the right of the people to govern themselves while characterizing Douglas? view of self-government as the right of a man to enslave another without interference. Thus, popular sovereignty becomes ? the right of people to govern niggers? (? House Divided? Speech, 1857; Speech at Edwardsville, IL, 1858). Liberty refers to the right of each man to do with his body and the products of his labor what he will (Lockean and Jeffersonian principles), not the right ? for some men to do as they please with other men, and the product of other men? s labor? (Address at Sanitary Fair, 1864). Lincoln reaffirms the notion of the natural rights over life, liberty, and property, and attacks the premise that men should naturally rule over other men ? equating this feudal, classical notion with Douglas and the Democrats.

Slavery, for Lincoln, is an absolute wrong, not such more in the moral terms of abolitionists, but in the principles of the founders. Slavery violates the principle of civil liberty of the Declaration. Lincoln maintains that there is no moral right for one man to enslave another (Speech on Kansas-Nebraska Act, 1854). The founders, and the spirit of the Declaration, abhorred slavery as an institution, but accepted in as a necessity. Lincoln attacks the view that

slavery is right in principle. He contrasts, in opposition to Fitzhugh, northern  
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laborers and slaves: northern laborers may work for wage one year, may work for themselves another, and may hire others to work for him in another. Northern laborers are free to choose their occupation, to acquire wealth, and to improve their condition. Slaves are denied this liberty. (Speech at Kalamazoo Michigan, 1856). While Lincoln denied that Negroes were equal in intellect and moral attributes to whites, he rigorously defends their equality of rights. Lincoln defends the natural right of blacks, and specifically, their right to ? life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? as written in the Declaration (Speech on the Dred Scott Decision, 1857). ? There is no reason in the world why the Negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (First Lincoln Douglas Debate, 1858). Lincoln holds that slavery is not ? better than freedom? and that government was created to secure the blessing of freedom ? for all men (Speech at Edwardsville, IL, 1858). The Declaration and Constitution, while securing property rights, suppose ? superior devotion to personal rights.? Individual liberty trumps property rights ? the right of a man to be free is greater than the right of a man to hold another man as property (Letter to Henry Pierce and Others, 1859).

For Lincoln, the founders held the principles of liberty and equality dear, and applied them to all men. Slavery undermines these principles, and was only tolerated for the necessity of the institution in Southern states; the founders intended for the containment, and eventual, gradual extermination of slavery. These principles of the American founding provide the ultimate example for the world of a nation built on liberty and self-government.

Should the American experiment fail, the cause of freedom would suffer a great setback. Thus, from his exemplifying the ideal of the founders, Lincoln derives his approach to the slavery issue and the view of the importance of the preservation of the Union.

### Moderation of approach

Lincoln's approach to issues, while building on the ideological background of the founders, is strictly pragmatic. Lincoln still maintains that slavery is a necessary evil, and believes that only moderate approaches, not radical change will be effective. Slavery can only be abolished gradually, and can only be limited from expansion at present. Moderation is necessary to preserve the Union.

Lincoln responds to radicals from both the South, but particularly the North (see for instance Thoreau and Emerson), that government serves the purpose both of redressing wrongs, and providing public goods. That is government serves needs that individual persons cannot provide for themselves, but not more than that; ? that if all men were just, there would still be some, though not so much, need of government? (Fragment on Government, 1854?).

The rule of law is a consistent theme in Lincoln's writings. When the law is ignored, and people lose attachment to government, civil society breaks down. Lincoln denounces mob rule and articulates the view that the ? sober judgment of courts? should govern. Bad laws do exist, and should be repealed, but until they are, they must be respected. Rule of mobs is detrimental to society and will tear apart any government (Address to Young <https://assignbuster.com/fitzhugh-and-his-defence-in-cannibals-all-philosophy-essay/>

Men's Lyceum, 1838). His approach to slavery is constrained by law ? using ? every constitutional method? to prevent the spread of slavery. (Speech at Edwardsville, IL, 1858). Lincoln's view on the Dred Scott decision demonstrates this view ? he claims not to resist the decision, but that the decision has not become ? settled? as precedent yet (Speech on the Dred Scott Decision, 1857). Lincoln does not hold the Dred Scott decision to be binding, or ? the word of the Lord?, but that it may yet be reversed.? His approach to the Dred Scott case is to acknowledge it as law, but to attempt through legal means, to reverse it and reduce its applicability to other cases (First Lincoln Douglas Debate, 1858).

### Approach to Slavery

Lincoln's positions on the current laws and the Dred Scott ruling demonstrate his commitment to the spirit of the Founding and his moderate, pragmatic approach. Lincoln advocates neither the immediate abolition of slavery (prior to the war), nor resistance to the interpretation of the court ? but only to attempt to change the law through political solutions.

Lincoln's approach to slavery concurs with the abolitionists on some points, but with the Southern interests on others. Lincoln supports the Fugitive Slave Law and opposed abolition of slavery in Southern states (prior to the Civil War), but opposes the extension of slavery in US territories. In this approach, he acknowledges the necessity of preserving slavery: slavery has been introduced in the South, and the Southern states are dependent upon it, slavery is a necessary evil. Likewise, Lincoln points to the founders in his position: the founders acknowledged the necessity of slavery, but wished for

its gradual extinction. The founders, like Lincoln, could not immediately eliminate the practice of slavery where it existed (the South) but attempted to limit it to where it currently was, banning the African Slave trade and opposing the extension to new territories. Thus, slavery was tolerated, but only in that it was necessary, and ultimately, wrong (Speech on Kansas-Nebraska Act, 1854). Slavery is viewed by Southerners in terms of dollars and cents, the institution is justified only as what it means for their economy (Speech at Kalamazoo Michigan, 1856).

Lincoln believes he cannot, under the constitution, nor should not for pragmatic reasons, interfere with slavery in Southern states (First Lincoln Douglas Debate, 1858). Lincoln's singular tool for opposition of the extension of slavery is for Congress to prohibit slavery in all the US Territories. Thus, the territories, when applying for statehood, may choose whether to permit slavery, without being corrupted and dependent upon slavery. Likewise, in the District of Columbia, slavery should only be abolished gradually, with the majority of the residents consenting, and with compensation for owners (Second Lincoln Douglas Debate, 1858). Though the federal government has the prerogative to prevent the extension of slavery into federal territories, the institution of slavery within the states of the south remains a state issue (Address at Cooper Institute, 1860).

Similarly, Lincoln does not support Negro citizenship ? i. e. allowing blacks to vote, serve on juries, etc, but merely the natural rights (as opposed to civil rights) that the Declaration declares for all men (Fourth Lincoln Douglas Debate, 1858). Lincoln believes that abolition of slavery will occur slowly, and only at the prerogative of states. During the Civil War, Lincoln advocates

for the plans to abolition slavery in the border states, but only gradually, with compensation for slave holders, and at the direction of the states (Message to Congress, 1862; Appeal for Compensated Emancipation, 1862; Annual Message to Congress, 1862).

Lincoln believes the founders view has been abandoned; the founders held a principle of 'the equality of all men', and began 'practical progress toward the equality of all men.' The view of all men as equal had been replaced by the view that 'all states are equal'. (Speech at a Republican Banquet in Chicago, 1856). The alteration of laws since the founding, and particularly the Dred Scott decision, have continued to restrict the rights of blacks. Freed slaves have lost the right to vote they once had in several states, and constraints on emancipation of slave owners have made continual bondage almost unalterable. 'Our Declaration of Independence' is assailed, and sneered at, and construed, and hawked at, and torn, till, if its framers could rise from their graves, they could not recognize it at all' (Speech on the Dred Scott Decision, 1857).

Lincoln's fear is that a 'second Dred Scott decision' will declare that slavery cannot be banned by any state. This fear is based on the nature of the Dred Scott ruling: that the right of property in a slave is affirmed in the Constitution, and that no laws may destroy the right of property in a slave. If these two premises are true, then states cannot ban slavery within their limits without violating the Constitution. However, Lincoln holds that these premises are false: that the Constitution does not affirm the right of property in a slave; as demonstrated above, Lincoln holds that the framers permitted slavery only as a necessity where it was already long-established. Lincoln's <https://assignbuster.com/fitzhugh-and-his-defence-in-cannibals-all-philosophy-essay/>

approach to this disagreement with the court was political? the? second Dred Scott? decision will never occur if the Republican Party is elected, but will certainly occur if the Democrats retain power. Thus via election, the Republicans can affect the makeup of the court and maintain the vision of the founders (Fifth Lincoln Douglas Debate, 1858).

Thus, in his approach to the Slavery issue, Lincoln reaffirms his commitment to the intent of the founders, as well as the moderation of his approach, consistent within legal bounds and pragmatic concerns.

### Preservation of the Union

While Lincoln maintains that he has no desire to interfere with slavery in Southern states, he does mandate the use of force to preserve the Union.

The Union of the United States is? perpetual?. No government ever has in its law a means for its extermination. The Constitution serves to make a? more perfect union?; secession of states is inconsistent with the Constitution. The minority has no right to secede from the government, or else the government serves no real purpose, and can never be maintained? it devolves to anarchy. Lincoln maintains that the laws of the Union must be executed throughout the States, thus justifying the use of force to execute the laws (First Inaugural Address, 1861). States have status only? in the Union?, not as separate institutions. There exists no principal by which the states may secede from the Union. States remain part of the United States, and thus it the duty of the federal government to uphold the law and? republican form of government? within the states? (Special Message to Congress, 1861).

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Lincoln articulates the need for war based upon these principles of preserving the union. The importance of a perpetual, democratic nation is the crux of his justification of military action. The Civil War is to ensure ? that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth? (Gettysburg Address, 1863). ? The nation is worth fighting for, to preserve such an inestimable jewel? (Speech to 166th Ohio Regiment, 1864). Thus Lincoln reverts to the importance of the principles of liberty, equality, and self-government of the founding, and the importance of the continuation of the democratic experiment.

Lincoln? s wartime approach to slavery continues his tendency toward the founding principles and toward moderation. He proposes first that slavery, as a necessary evil, be abolished only gradually (at one point stating over 37 years), with compensation, and at the direction of states (Message to Congress, 1862; Appeal for Compensated Emancipation, 1862; Annual Message to Congress, 1862). His Emancipation Proclamation abolishes slavery only in areas that are in rebellion against the Union ? thus serving military goals of winning the war more than a goal of immediate abolition. Lincoln later support a Constitutional Amendment prohibiting slavery as, in his view, the only way to ensure the continual preservation of the United States is to eliminate the cause for civil war. Thus, sudden elimination of slavery serves the pragmatic concern of preservation of the Union (Reply to Committee of National Union Convention, 1864; Proclamation Concerning Reconstruction; 1864).

Like he pre-presidency stance on slavery, Lincoln? s desire to preserve the Union and his actions during the Civil War demonstrate his commitment to <https://assignbuster.com/fitzhugh-and-his-defence-in-cannibals-all-philosophy-essay/>

the founders? principles of liberty, equality, and republican government as well as his pragmatism. The Union is worth fighting for, as the principles of the founders must endure in a ? perfect.? Lincoln? s actions toward slavery reflect his belief in the validity of the Constitution and his pragmatism. Initially indicating the desire for gradual abolition of slavery in border states, and at state prerogative demonstrate his belief in the limits of the Constitution and the consistency of moderation in his proposal; mirroring the pragmatic approach of the Emancipation Proclamation. His eventual belief that slavery must be exterminated nationally only evolves from his commitment to the preservation of the union, and the pragmatic belief that the Union can only ensure its perpetuality if slavery, and the conflict surrounding it, is ended for all time.