04: Proslavery Ideology

What Factors Explain the Emergence and Development of Proslavery Ideology?
Proslavery Ideology

1. Introduction
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Necessary Evil

Letter of Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes (1820)

✧ What did Thomas Jefferson see as the problem posed by slavery?
✧ What did he see as the solutions for the problems created by slavery?
✧ What was Jefferson’s objection to the Missouri Compromise?
Necessary Evil

“[W]e have the wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other.” — Letter of Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes (1820)
“The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it.... The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities.” — Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (1781)
“Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state...? Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.” — Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781)
Necessary Evil

“[O]f one thing I am certain, that as the passage of slaves from one state to another would not make a slave of a single human being who would not be so without it, so their diffusion over a greater surface would make them individually happier and proportionally facilitate the accomplishment of their emancipation, by dividing the burthen on a greater number of co-adjutors.” —Letter of Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes (1820)
Positive Good

“[T]he master should be the friend of his servant.... Friendship implies good will, kindness, a desire for the welfare of him for whom it is entertained.... The servant, under such a master, knows his condition, and understands that, while he is restricted to certain privileges and required to perform certain duties, he is not held in subjection by an unfeeling tyrant, nor driven to his work by a heartless oppressor.... [This] assures him that there is one who cares for him; and, notwithstanding he goes forth to his daily labor, and toils at his daily task, his heart is light, his song is cheerful.” — Reverend A. T. Holmes, “The Duties of Christian Masters” (1851)
“[T]he master should be the protector of his servant.... The servant should feel that the superior wisdom, experience, power and authority of his master, constitute his abiding security. He should be encouraged to rely upon their certain and constant exercise, so that in regard to necessity, comfort, personal difficulty or danger, he may, confidently, look to his master for that protection.... It will advance the master’s interest.... [T]he servant learns to value his protection, loves his master, is attached to his home.” — Reverend A. T. Holmes, “The Duties of Christian Masters” (1851)
The master should be the guide of his servant. Ordinary conduct and conversation are observed, manner is marked, habits are noticed, and, according as the master regulates his life by principles of right, his servant is influenced for good or for evil. The master may be a profane man, or a Sabbath breaker, or a drinker of ardent spirits ... and, almost invariably, will his licentious course be acted out by those who are controlled, as well by his influence and example, as by his authority.” — Reverend A. T. Holmes, “The Duties of Christian Masters” (1851)
“[T]he master should be the teacher of his servant. Ignorance, in a peculiar sense, attaches to the negro.... It devolves, therefore, upon the master, in the discharge of his duty, to have respect to the ignorant condition of his servant, for ignorant, credulous and superstitious as he is, at the same time he is an immortal and accountable being.... The effort made to instruct our servants, should be appropriate. Some plan should be adopted suited to their capacity.” — Reverend A. T. Holmes, “The Duties of Christian Masters” (1851)
“The ‘peculiar institution’ of slavery was not perfect or sinless, but the reality was a far cry from the horrific descriptions given to us in modern histories, which are often nothing more than a hackneyed reworking of abolitionist propaganda. Judge George L. Christian observed, ‘In the first place slavery, as it existed in the South, was patriarchal in its character; the slaves (servants, as we called them) were regarded and treated as members of the families to which they severally belonged; with rare exceptions, they were treated with kindness and consideration, and frequently the relations between the slave and his owner, were those of real affection and confidence’. Slavery as it existed in the South was not an adversarial relationship with pervasive racial animosity.... There has never been a multi-racial society which has existed with such mutual intimacy and harmony in the history of the world.” —Steve Wilkins & Douglas Wilson, “Southern Slavery As It Was” (1996)

Ideology vs. Practice

✧ What were Quitman’s beliefs about slavery?
✧ How did Quitman’s slaves act? How do you explain their behavior?
✧ How did Quitman and his family reconcile these beliefs with their slaves’ actions?
✧ What do we know about slaveholder-slave relations on the Quitman plantations? How do we know it? What do we not know?
Conclusion
Bibliography

