

**17.037/17.038. American Political Thought**  
**Spring 2004**

**Reading/Discussion Questions for Week 8. Racism, Nativism, and Sexism in Antebellum America**

**Calhoun**

The central question Calhoun pursues is how government can be prevented from abusing its powers. He thinks that the right of suffrage is insufficient to prevent government from abusing its powers and argues for a government by a “concurrent majority.” What is a government by a concurrent majority, and how does it prevent government from abusing its powers? What are the problems with rule by a concurrent majority?

Calhoun states that liberty is “a reward to be earned” (42). How is liberty earned?

What is the relationship between liberty and equality? How does inequality of conditions contribute to progress in his view?

**Fitzhugh**

What is wrong with a society based on economic competition and free trade?

Fitzhugh associates liberty with barbarism: “The love of personal liberty...are distinguishing traits of wild men and wild beasts... As civilization advances, liberty recedes” (60). What do you think he mean by this?

In what ways, according to Fitzhugh, is a slave better off than a free laborer? See his discussion of the “protective influence of slavery” (83), class warfare in a free society (56-57), and pauperism and crime (63-66).

How does Fitzhugh relate socialism and slavery? He suggests both that socialism leads toward slavery and that slavery is the best form of socialism. In what way are socialism and slavery allied causes? Do you agree?

Why does Fitzhugh think blacks are unsuited for freedom and democracy?

**Grimke and Beecher**

How does Grimke argue for women’s rights? How do her arguments for supporting women’s independence differ from Beecher’s?

What, in Beecher’s view, is women’s “true vocation”? In what ways does Beecher think men and women are “essentially different”? Why is it important that women have an “independent livelihood and honorable employ”? How, on her reading of the Bible, does women’s being the weaker sex ensure that their interests are better protected?