

few whites had actually attained. But before we condemn the abolitionists for their failure to convert America to a belief in racial equality by confronting directly the social, economic, and psychological roots of prejudice, it must be acknowledged that no other approach than the one they adopted was really open to them. Their time and place provided them neither the means nor the social philosophy to deal adequately with the ravages of racial prejudice and the growth of racism as an ideology. If they did not succeed in making racial egalitarianism an operative national creed, they did at least contribute eventually to a rise in the intensity of Northern opposition to slavery as an institution. What remains to be explained is the apparently paradoxical fact that the abolitionists could thus gain support for their attack on slavery at the very time a newly systematized doctrine of black inferiority was also triumphing in American thought.

Chapter Two

Slavery and Race:

The Southern Dilemma

Prior to the 1830s, black subordination was the practice of white Americans, and the inferiority of the Negro was undoubtedly a common assumption, but open assertions of *permanent* inferiority were exceedingly rare. It took the assault of the abolitionists to unmask the cant about a theoretical human equality that coexisted with Negro slavery and racial discrimination and to force the practitioners of racial oppression to develop a theory that accorded with their behavior. Well before the rise of radical abolitionism, however, spokesmen for the lower South gave notice that they were prepared to defend slavery as an institution against any kind of attack that might develop. In the 1820s the leadership of the major cotton-producing states made it clear that a national colonization effort was unacceptable because in their view slavery was an essential and Constitutionally protected local institution which was no concern of the Federal government or the nonslaveholding states. These apologists for black servitude characteristically answered the colonizationists by agreeing with them that emancipation on the soil was unthinkable and then proceeding to point out not only that colonization was impractical as a program of Negro removal but also that its very agitation was a danger to the security of a slave society because the expectations it raised among blacks threatened to undermine the

discipline of the plantation. A permanent and rigid slave system, it was argued, was both economically necessary in the rice- and cotton-growing areas and vital as a system of control for a potentially dangerous black population. Such a viewpoint soon triumphed in all the slaveholding states. In 1831 and 1832, the Virginia legislature debated a colonization proposal that might have opened the way to gradual emancipation, but its defeat marked the end of a serious search, even in the upper South, for some way to set slavery on the path to extinction.¹

After the Virginia debate, Professor Thomas R. Dew of William and Mary College, speaking for the victorious proslavery faction, set forth the most thorough and comprehensive justification of the institution that the South had yet produced. Dew's effort should properly be seen as reflecting a transitional stage in the proslavery argument. Since he was refuting the proponents of gradual emancipation and colonization who still thrived in western Virginia and not the new and radical abolitionists of the North, his arguments stressed practicality and expediency and, in a sense, did little more than help bring Virginia in line with the kind of proslavery sentiment already triumphant farther South. Much of his lengthy essay was devoted to showing that colonization was an impossible scheme because the natural increase of the black population would outrun any number that could possibly be colonized. His justification of slavery rested first of all on the contention that servitude had been a necessary stage of human progress and hence could not be regarded as evil in itself. He then went on to argue that the concrete circumstances of Southern life required the institution and that no set of abstract principles should be invoked to obscure the basic fact that the Negro was not prepared for freedom. Although this was fundamentally an extension of the kind of argument that had previously been

1. On proslavery attitudes in the lower South in the 1820s, see William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (New York, 1966), Chapter III and pp. 122-128; and William Sumner Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1935), pp. 65-79. The best account of the Virginia debate is Joseph Clarke Robert, *The Road from Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832* (Durham, N.C., 1941).

the basis of the defense of slavery as "a necessary evil," Dew implied that such a practical adjustment to reality had no evil in it, and he raised expediency to the level of conservative principle when he cited Edmund Burke's dictum that "circumstances give in reality to every political principle its distinguishing color and discriminating effect."²

In his discussion of Negro character and prospects, Dew did not deviate forthrightly and insistently from traditional quasi-environmentalist assumptions about the nature of most racial differences. Although at the beginning of his essay he described Negroes as "differing from us in color and habits and vastly inferior in the scale of civilization," he did not deal consistently with the question whether this inferiority resulted from innate character or from the "habits" engendered by a long exposure to inhibiting circumstances. In his discussion of "obstacles to emancipation," Dew at one point provided an analysis not incompatible with the conservative environmentalism of the colonizationists. "The blacks," he wrote, "have now all the habits and feelings of slaves, the whites have those of masters; the prejudices are formed, and mere legislation cannot improve them. . . . Declare the Negroes of the South free tomorrow, and vain will be your decree until you have prepared them for it. . . . The law would make them freemen, and custom or prejudice, we care not which you call it, would degrade them to the condition of slaves." Such a prediction, he indicated, was merely an application of the rule that "each one should remain in society in the condition in which he has been born and trained, and not [try] to mount too fast without preparation."³

This ultraconservative principle could presumably have been applied to slaves or serfs of any race; and, as if to substantiate this inference, Dew went on to give as an example of premature emancipation the attempt to liberate the Polish peasants in the 1790s. But Dew could also describe black behavior as if it were predetermined by innate racial traits; for he contradicted his

2. "Professor Dew on Slavery," *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (Charleston, 1852), p. 355, and *passim*. Dew's essay was originally published as *Review of the Debate of the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832* (Richmond, 1832).

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 287, 435-436.

suggestion that Negro characteristics were simply acquired habits of servility by arguing, somewhat obscurely, that the supposed indolence of free blacks resulted from "an inherent and intrinsic cause." And when he asserted that "the free black will work *nowhere* except by compulsion," he decisively parted company with the colonizationists.⁴ If Dew was a transitional figure in the general defense of slavery because he combined arguments from expediency with hints of a conservative, proslavery theory of society, he was equally transitional as a racial theorist, because of his vacillation between arguments for black inferiority drawn from a perception of the force of "habits," "customs," and "prejudices" and those suggesting that a permanency of racial type justified enslavement.

By the middle of the 1830s the full impact of the abolitionist argument had been felt in the South, and Dew's ambiguous treatment of the racial factor and his contention that slavery was sometimes justified by circumstances no longer provided Southern apologists with what they regarded as a fully adequate defense of the institution. The abolitionists' charge that slavery was inherently sinful was now met increasingly by the unequivocal claim that slavery was "a positive good." Furthermore their practical assertion of racial equality as something to be achieved in the United States and not through colonization inspired proslavery spokesmen to clarify their racial views and to assert, as a major part of their case, the unambiguous concept of inherent Negro inferiority.

South Carolinians led the way. In 1835 Governor George McDuffie told the South Carolina General Assembly that the Negroes were "destined by providence" for slavery and that this was made evident not only by the color of their skin but also by "the intellectual inferiority and natural improvidence of this race." They were, he indicated, "unfit for self-government of any kind," and "in all respects, physical, moral, and political, inferior to millions of the human race." McDuffie professed astonishment that anyone should "suppose it possible to reclaim the African race from their destiny" as slaves or subjects of some

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 437, 429-430. (The italics are mine.)

other form of absolute despotism.⁵ The Charleston lawyer William Drayton said much the same thing the following year in a pamphlet attacking the abolitionists: "Personal observation must convince every candid man, that the negro is constitutionally indolent, voluptuous, and prone to vice; that his mind is heavy, dull, and unambitious; and that the doom that has made the African in all ages and countries, a slave—is the natural consequence of the inferiority of his character."⁶ In 1837 John C. Calhoun made his famous defense of slavery before the Senate of the United States and showed how important racial doctrines really were in the new and militant defense of servitude which developed in the 1830s. "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."⁷

It was thus in tandem with the concept of slavery as "a positive good" that the doctrine of permanent black inferiority began its career as a rationale, first for slavery itself and later for post-emancipation forms of racial oppression. The attitudes that underlay the belief that the Negro was doomed by nature itself to perpetual slavishness and subordination to the whites were not new, nor was the doctrine itself if considered as a popular belief that lacked intellectual respectability; but when asserted dogmatically and with an aura of philosophical authority by leading Southern spokesmen and their Northern supporters in the 1830s, it became, for the first time, the basis of a world view, an explicit ideology around which the beneficiaries of white supremacy could organize themselves and their thoughts.

The emergence of racist ideology in the United States was comparable in some respects to the rise of European conservative

5. Speech before the General Assembly of South Carolina, as reprinted in *The Source Book of American History*, ed. Albert Bushnell Hart (New York, 1905), p. 245.

6. William Drayton, *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists* (Philadelphia, 1836), p. 232.

7. John C. Calhoun, *Works*, ed. Richard K. Crallé (New York, 1853-1857), II, 631.

ideology, as described by Karl Mannheim in his essay on "Conservative Thought." Mannheim made a distinction between "traditionalism"—the emotional and relatively inarticulate tendency to hold on to established and inherited patterns of life—and "conservatism," which he saw as "conscious and reflective from the first, since it arises as a counter movement in conscious opposition to the highly organized, coherent, and systematic 'progressive' movement." This distinction is clearly analogous to one that can be drawn between racial prejudice as an emotional response to an enslaved and physically distinct group and the early form of ideological racism as a "conscious and reflective" attempt to develop, in response to an insistent egalitarianism, a world view based squarely and explicitly on the idea that whites are unalterably superior to blacks. As long as the traditional order was not threatened by radicalism, it required no elaborate theoretical defense. Or, as Gustave de Beaumont, Tocqueville's companion, put it in his novel, *Marie*: "As long as philanthropy on behalf of the Negroes resulted in nothing but useless declamation, the Americans tolerated it without difficulty; it mattered little to them that the equality of the Negroes should be proclaimed in theory, so long as in fact they remained inferior to the whites." But abolitionism, like Jacobinism, forced previously unarticulated assumptions to the level of defensive ideological consciousness.⁸

The colonizationists may have stimulated an indirect and pragmatic defense of slavery as a regional necessity, but their occasional expressions of a theoretical racial egalitarianism had not forced their Southern opponents to proclaim vigorously that the Negro was inherently inferior and slavish, for the reason that proponents of colonization had not challenged the necessity or inevitability of black subservience as a fact of life in the United States. The abolitionist contention that Christianity and the Declaration of Independence not only affirmed equality in theory but cried out for its immediate implementation could not go similarly unanswered by the defenders of black subordination.

8. Karl Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology* (London, 1953), pp. 99 and 74-164, *passim*; Gustave de Beaumont, *Marie, or Slavery in the United States* (Stanford, Cal., 1958), p. 11. (First published in 1835.)

In their efforts to justify slavery as a necessary system of race relations, the proslavery theorists of the 1830s and 1840s developed an arsenal of arguments for Negro inferiority which they repeated *ad nauseam*. Heavily emphasized was the historical case against the black man based on his supposed failure to develop a civilized way of life in Africa. As portrayed in proslavery writings, Africa was and always had been the scene of unmitigated savagery, cannibalism, devil worship, and licentiousness. Also advanced was an early form of the biological argument, based on real or imagined physiological and anatomical differences—especially in cranial characteristics and facial angles—which allegedly explained mental and physical inferiority. Finally there was the appeal to deep-seated white fears of widespread miscegenation, as proslavery theorists sought to deepen white anxieties by claiming that the abolition of slavery would lead to intermarriage and the degeneracy of the race. Although all these arguments had appeared earlier in fugitive or embryonic form, there is something startling about the rapidity with which they were brought together and organized in a rigid polemical pattern, once the defenders of slavery found themselves in a propaganda war with the abolitionists.

The basic racist case against the abolitionist assertion of equality sprang full blown—but without the authoritative "scientific" underpinning that would later give it greater respectability—in a pamphlet published in New York in 1833, entitled *Evidence Against the Views of the Abolitionists, Consisting of Physical and Moral Proofs of the Natural Inferiority of the Negroes*. In this extraordinary document a writer named Richard Colfax set forth in rudimentary form all the basic elements of the racist theory of Negro character. Colfax emphasized in particular a whole range of physical differences between whites and blacks which supposedly demonstrated inherent Negro inferiority. The Negro's facial angle, he contended, was "almost to a level with that of the brute"; hence "the acknowledged meanness of the Negro's intellect only coincides with the shape of his head." The lesson to be drawn from such data was that the black man's "want of capacity to receive a complicated education renders it improper and impolitic that he should be allowed the privileges of citizenship

in an enlightened country." Since "the Negroes, whether physically or morally considered, are so inferior as to resemble the brute creation as nearly as they do the white species, . . . no alteration of their present social condition would be productive of the least benefit to them, inasmuch as no change of their nature can be expected to result therefrom." This unchangeability of the black character had been demonstrated historically, according to Colfax, because over a period of three or four thousand years Africans had had many opportunities to benefit from personal liberty and "their proximity to refined nations," but they had "never even attempted to raise themselves above their present equivocal station in the great zoological chain."⁹

The only element lacking in Colfax's racist argument was a full scientific explanation of the underlying causes of inequality. In the century that followed, theorists of racial inferiority would offer new and ingenious proofs or explanations for Colfax's assertions, but they would add very little to his general thesis.

As part of their effort to gain widespread support for such views, proslavery polemicists turned their attention to the free Negroes of the North, whom they presented not so much as a population degraded by white prejudice and color consciousness as one demonstrating its natural unfitness for freedom. When the census of 1840, which later proved to be inaccurate, revealed a very high rate of insanity among free Negroes as compared with slaves, they seized upon these statistics as evidence of the Negro's constitutional inability to function in a free society. In 1844 Calhoun, then Secretary of State, concluded that "the census and

9. Richard H. Colfax, *Evidence Against the Views of the Abolitionists* . . . (New York, 1833), pp. 25-26, 30, and *passim*. In the late 1840s and 1850s, these arguments would be placed in a framework of respectable scientific theory by the "American School of ethnology" (see Chapter Three below). Subsequent to the publication of Colfax's *Evidence Against the Views of the Abolitionists*, the same historical and biological case against the Negro was presented, for example, in Drayton's *The South Vindicated* (1836); James Kirke Paulding's *Slavery in the United States* (New York, 1836); J. H. Guenebaut's *Natural History of the Negro Race* (Charleston, 1837); The Reverend Josiah Priest's *Slavery, As It Relates to the Negro or African Race* (Albany, N.Y., 1843); Samuel A. Cartwright's *Essays, Being Inductions Drawn from the Baconian Philosophy* . . . (Vidalia, La., 1843); and Matthew Estes, *A Defense of Negro Slavery, As It Exists in the United States* (Montgomery, Ala., 1846).

other authentic documents show that, in all instances in which the states have changed the former relation between the two races, the African, instead of being improved, has become worse. They have been invariably sunk into vice and pauperism, accompanied by bodily and mental afflictions incident thereto—deafness, insanity and idiocy—to a degree without example. . . ."¹⁰

II

As the debate progressed, it became evident that Northern opponents of slavery could, if they chose, easily deflect the increasingly vexed question of biological differences by arguing that constitutional Negro deficiencies, even if they existed, provided no justification for slavery. On the contrary, they would only make it more sinful, for what could be more unchristian than exploitation of the weak by the strong? Owen Lovejoy, an abolitionist Congressman from Illinois and brother of the martyred editor Elijah P. Lovejoy, eloquently presented this point of view in 1860: "We may concede it as a matter of fact that [the Negro race] is inferior; but does it follow, therefore, that it is right to enslave a man simply because he is inferior? This, to me, is a most abhorrent doctrine. It could place the weak everywhere at the mercy of the strong; it would place the poor at the mercy of the rich; it would place those who are deficient in intellect at the mercy of those that are gifted in mental endowment. . . ."¹¹

Many Southerners were themselves too strongly influenced by

10. John C. Calhoun, *Works*, V, 337. There are excellent discussions of the controversy over the census of 1840 in Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago, 1961), pp. 40-46, and Norman Dain, *Concepts of Insanity in the United States, 1789-1865* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1964), pp. 104-108.

11. "The principle upon which slaveholding was sought to be justified in this country would, if carried out in the affairs of the universe," Lovejoy added, "transform Jehovah, the supreme, into an infinite juggernaut, rolling the huge wheels of his omnipotence, ankle deep, amid the crushed, and mangled, and bleeding bodies of human beings on the ground that he was infinitely superior, and that they were an inferior race." (Cited in the *Liberator*, April 26, 1860.)

Christian and humanitarian values to let such an indictment stand. Their answer was that the slave was not only unfit for freedom but was ideally suited to slavery; for the Negro found happiness and fulfillment only when he had a white master. As one writer put it, Negro slaves are "the most cheerful and merry people we have among us."¹² Far from the blacks' being "degraded," Southern apologists maintained that they were much better off in slavery than they had been in Africa. According to the South Carolina novelist William Gilmore Simms, the Negro came from a continent where he was "a cannibal, destined . . . to eat his fellow, or be eaten by him." Southern slavery "brought him to a land in which he suffers no risk of life or limb other than that to which his owner is equally subjected," and had increased "his health and strength," improved "his physical symmetry and animal organization," elevated "his mind and morals," and given "him better and more certain food, better clothing, and more kind and valuable attendance when he is sick." It was no wonder, then, that he had developed a happy disposition.¹³

In promulgating the stereotype of the happy and contented bondman, Southerners were doing more than simply putting out propaganda to counter the abolitionist image of the wretched slave. They were also seeking to put to rest their own nagging fears of slave rebellion. It was no accident that proslavery spokesmen in the Virginia legislature made much of the alleged contentment of the slaves; for the debate took place in the wake of the Nat Turner uprising of 1831, and servitude had come under attack as leading inevitably to black resistance. One of the proslavery members made it clear that the recent rebellion was a bizarre exception to the general pattern of master-slave relationships: "Our slave population is not only a happy one, but it is a contented, peaceful and harmless . . . during all this time [the last sixty years] we have had one insurrection."¹⁴

12. William A. Smith, *Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery* . . . (Nashville, 1856), pp. 223-224.

13. William Gilmore Simms, "The Morals of Slavery," *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, p. 273. (Originally published in *The Southern Literary Messenger* III [November, 1837], 641-657.)

14. From a speech of James Cholsen of Brunswick County, in Robert, *Road from Monticello*, p. 67.

The image of black violence and retribution, drawn not only from Nat Turner but from memories of what had occurred in Santo Domingo, continued to haunt the Southern imagination however. Insurrection panics were frequent after 1830, and for men who supposedly ruled over a docile population, Southern slaveowners were extraordinarily careful to maintain absolute control over their "people" and to quarantine them from any kind of outside influence that might inspire dissatisfaction with their condition. In moments of candor, Southerners admitted their suspicion that duplicity, opportunism, and potential rebelliousness lurked behind the mask of Negro affability.¹⁵

A concept of the duality or instability of Negro character was in fact one of the most important contributions made by Southern proslavery propagandists to the racist imagery that outlasted slavery. In its original protoracist form, this duality was the one set forth by Thomas R. Dew between the savage Negro of Africa and the "civilized" black slave. Dew maintained that no large-scale insurrections were likely "where the blacks are as much civilized as they are in the United States. Savages and Koro-many slaves can commit such deeds, because their whole life and education have prepared them; but the Negro of the United States has imbibed the principles, sentiments, and the feelings of the whites; in one word, he is civilized. . . ." But Dew's analysis implicitly conceded too much to environment; indeed it made the Negro character seem almost infinitely plastic. What, it might be asked, was to prevent blacks from soon becoming "civilized" up to the level of the whites and claiming equality with them? Later writers often qualified the notion that slavery "civilized" the Negro by asserting that innate racial traits limited his potential development to a more or less tenuous state of "semi-civilization," a conception which provided an unequivocal justification of permanent servitude.

According to this theory, the Negro was by nature a savage brute. Under slavery, however, he was "domesticated" or, to a

15. See Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, ed. Ben Ames Williams (Boston, 1949), p. 141, for a classic expression of Southern doubts about slave contentment and docility.

16. *Pro-Slavery Argument*, p. 463.

limited degree, "civilized." Hence docility was not so much his natural character as an artificial creation of slavery. As long as the control of the master was firm and assured, the slave would be happy, loyal, and affectionate; but remove or weaken the authority of the master, and he would revert to type as a blood-thirsty savage. That many Southerners did not believe, even in theory, in Negro docility under *all* conditions came out most vividly in proslavery discussions of emancipation and its probable consequences. Servile war was often seen as the inevitable result of loosening the bonds of servitude. In the words of William Drayton, who drew on the example of Santo Domingo, "the madness which a sudden freedom from restraint begets—the overpowering burst of a long buried passion, the wild frenzy of revenge, and the savage lust for blood, all unite to give the warfare of liberated slaves, traits of cruelty and crime which nothing earthly can equal."¹⁷ Drayton's suggestion that emancipation would bring a reversion to basic savage type was set forth more explicitly by a writer in *De Bow's Review*, who described as "... the brutish propensities of the negro now unchecked, there remains no road for their full exercise . . . but in the slaughter of his white master, and through the slaughter, he strides (unless he himself be exterminated) to the full exercise of his *native barbarity and savageness*."¹⁸ As proof of the Negro's inevitable "reversion to type" when freed, defenders of slavery pointed continually to the alleged "relapse into barbarism" which had taken place in Haiti, the British West Indies, and Liberia, once the domesticating influence of slavery had been removed.¹⁹

The notion that bestial savagery constituted the basic Negro character and that the loyal "Sambo" figure was a social product of slavery served to channel genuine fears and anxieties by suggesting a program of preventive action, while at the same time

17. Drayton, *The South Vindicated*, p. 246.

18. "L. S. M.," review of John Campbell's *Negromania*, in *The Industrial Resources of the Southern and Western States*, ed. J. D. B. De Bow (New Orleans, 1852), II, 203. (The italics are mine.)

19. See for example, Thomas R. R. Cobb, *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery in the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1858), pp. cxcvii, cxcviii.

legitimizing a conditional "affection" for the Negro. As a slave he was lovable, but as a freedman he would be a monster. This duality was expressed in its most extreme form by Dr. Samuel A. Cartwright of Louisiana, who wrote in 1861 that "... the negro must, from necessity, be the slave of man or the slave of Satan."²⁰

There were, however, ambiguities in the concept of Negro "domestication" or "semi-civilization" under slavery. One involved the question of whether or not, in the far distant future, the slave's savage instincts might entirely disappear as the result of some quasi-Lamarckian process of evolution, a development which would presumably fit the Negro for a change of status. Many writers regarded this question as open and undecided; others fell into blatant self-contradiction when they confronted it. William Gilmore Simms, in setting forth a proslavery theory of human progress, described how the rise of peoples to civilized status had often involved the tutelage of slavery as a stage in their development. "It is possible that a time will come," he wrote, "when, taught by our schools, and made strong by our training, the negroes of the southern states may arrive at freedom." Later in the same paragraph, however, he rudely shut the door that he had tentatively opened: "I do not believe that [the Negro] will ever be other than a slave, or that he was made to be otherwise; but that he is designed as an implement in the hand of civilization always."²¹ This view was given authoritative expression from the mid-1840s on by "ethnological" writers like Samuel Cartwright and Josiah Nott. From a narrowly proslavery perspective, however, the whole question was in effect academic, because even those apologists who accepted the possibility that blacks might someday be ready for freedom maintained that additional centuries of servitude would be required to transform the essential Negro character.²²

A more significant ambiguity, one which led to an important

20. Dr. Samuel Cartwright, "Negro Freedom: An Impossibility under Nature's Laws," *De Bow's Review*, XXX (May-June, 1861), 651.

21. *Pro-Slavery Arguments*, pp. 266-268.

22. For an example of the thesis that blacks would be ready "at some distant day" for "the privileges of civil liberty," see W. A. Smith, *Lectures on . . . Slavery* (1856), p. 246 and *passim*. By the time Smith wrote, however, this was clearly not the dominant view among proslavery apologists.

cleavage, resulted from differences over exactly what Negro "domestication" meant in terms of the actual relationships between masters and slaves. One way of suggesting what was at issue is to ask whether the model for the ideal slave was taken from the realm of the subhuman, with the slave as a high type of domesticated animal to serve as the white man's tool like another beast of burden, or from the human family as a "domestic" and domesticating institution, with the slave in the role of a child, responding with human affection to a kindly master. This ambiguity was related to an ambiguity about the nature of the plantation: was it a commercial enterprise with the nature of the subhuman labor force, or a small patriarchal society?

George Fitzhugh, writing in the 1850s, was the most eloquent spokesman of the familial or paternalist view of slavery. For him, the harsh, exploitative side of slavery disappeared almost entirely; the master became a "parent or guardian," and the slave a child who, on the basis of a "common humanity," was admitted to "the family circle"²³ and subjected to "family government." The view of Negro psychology that sustained such a view was set forth by the Reverend H. N. McIntyre in a typical example of the advice that clergymen of a certain type gave to slaveholders: "The sympathies which have their range within the social system—the emotions which form the ordinary cement of social existence, are found in the negro, and they are to be taken into account, in dealing with him. The master who ignores them and proceeds on brute principles, will vex his own soul and render his servants worthless and wretched. Love and fear, a regard for public opinion, gratitude, shame, the conjugal, parental, and filial feelings, these must all be appealed to and cultivated."²⁴

The very fact, however, that such advice had to be given suggests that there was a contrary point of view. Paternalists emphasized the reality of slave "gratitude" as a natural human emotion deriving from kindly treatment; men with a different orientation thought differently. This, for example, is how George S. Sawyer,

²³ Louisiana slaveholder, described the Negro character: "The very many instances of remarkable fidelity and attachment to their masters, a characteristic quite common among them, are founded not so much upon any high intellectual and refined sentiment of gratitude, as upon instinctive impulse, possessed to an even higher degree by some of the canine species."²⁵

It was a short step from such an analogy to the argument that it was more difficult to mistreat Negroes or to overwork them than would be the case with whites; and some Southerners even concluded that for most purposes a master could simply forget about the possibility that his charges had normal human sensibilities. Cartwright, a Louisiana physician who had many years of practice on the plantations of what was then the Southwest, maintained in 1843 that the Negro race "has a peculiar instinct protecting it against the abuses of arbitrary power"; for blacks could not be overworked and were comparatively insensitive to sufferings that would be unbearable to whites. But Cartwright did believe that there was such a thing as "mismanagement" of Negroes. In a later "medical" essay, he described various Negro "diseases" that resulted from it, including drapetomania (running away) and rascality. Since such afflictions stemmed from bad government or imperfect slavery, their source was not in the harshness of servitude but in the unnatural liberty permitted by ineffectual masters.²⁶ The comforting notion that slaves did not suffer, even from flagrant mistreatment, was given expression by a Southern lady novelist in 1860. She not only argued that Negroes could not be overworked but claimed that it was physically impossible for a master to knock a slave "senseless to the ground"—as he was so often knocked in abolitionist writings—because the Negro skull was so thick that such an effort would bruise or break a white man's fist.²⁷

The supposed animal insensitivity of the Negro was also

²⁵ George S. Sawyer, *Southern Institutes; or, an Inquiry into the Origin and Early Prevalence of Slavery and the Slave Trade* (Philadelphia, 1858), p. 197.

²⁶ Samuel A. Cartwright, *Essays*, p. 3, and "Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro," in De Bow, ed., *Industrial Resources*, II, 318-324. For another expression of the view that the Negro, like the mule, could not be overworked, see Estes, *Defense of Negro Slavery*, pp. 78-80.

²⁷ Mrs. Henry Schoolcraft, *The Black Gauntlet: A Tale of Plantation Life in South Carolina* (Philadelphia, 1860), pp. 49, 61.

²³ George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South; or, the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond, 1854), pp. 82-83, 105-107; *Cannibals All! or, Slaves Without Masters*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 205. (First published in 1857.)

²⁴ H. N. McIntyre, "Plantation Life—Duties and Responsibilities," *De Bow's Review*, XXIX (September, 1860), 361.

invoked as a basis for denying familial affection among slaves and thereby implicitly justifying the breakup of families. According to Thomas R. R. Cobb of Georgia, the Negro's "natural affections are not strong, and consequently he is cruel to his offspring, and suffers little by separation from them."²⁸ Sawyer went further and asserted that blacks are totally lacking in family feeling and that it is "just and beastly cruelty" and not "emotions of parental and kindred attachment" that "glow in the negro's bosom."²⁹ Such opinions suggest that the kind of "hard" racism that manifests itself in the image of "the Negro as beast" did not originate in the era of segregation late in the nineteenth century but had its origins in the antebellum period, when it vied for supremacy in Southern propaganda with the "soft" image of the black slave as beloved child.

III

The South's fundamental conception of itself as a slaveholding society was unstable. In the intellectual context of the time, the notion of the slave as dependent or child implied one kind of social order; the view that he was essentially subhuman suggested another.

Seeing the Negro as basically human despite his inferiority was compatible in theory with his integration into a certain type of human society—one based on a frank and open recognition of a whole range of inequalities. One branch of proslavery thought took this tack—the theoretical defense of a social order in which slavery was part of a larger hierarchy maintained by a sense of mutual obligation between superiors and inferiors. This viewpoint was foreshadowed by Thomas R. Dew's dictum that everyone, white or black, should be content to remain in the social station "in which he has been born and bred," and that consequently it was as ill advised for planters to encourage white overseers to aspire to gentility by giving them access to the

drawing room as it was to invite expectations of freedom from the slaves.³⁰ In a defense of slavery published in 1838, Chancellor William Harper of the University of South Carolina elaborated on this hierarchical concept when he answered the abolitionist charge that the slave was denied the possibility of intellectual improvement by attacking the very notion of a society based on equality of opportunity. "The slave receives," Harper wrote, "such instruction as qualifies him to discharge the duties of his particular station. The Creator did not intend that every human being should be highly cultivated, morally and intellectually." Then, hitting even more directly at the American egalitarian ideal, he added: "... if, as Providence has evidently decreed, there can be but a certain portion of intellectual excellence in any community, it is better that it should be *unequally* divided. It is better that a part should be fully and highly cultivated, and the rest utterly ignorant." As a matter of principle, the lower classes, regardless of race, should be subordinated and kept in ignorance. Following the logic of his argument, Harper contended that the misery and uncertainty of status which seemed endemic to the "laborious poor" of nonslaveholding societies could be readily relieved by the imposition of something like slavery.³¹

Out of this kind of reactionary thinking there evolved by the early 1850s the fully developed thesis that slavery was "a positive good," not only as a system of controlling an inferior race but, more basically, as a way of providing security to the laboring class of any society. George Fitzhugh carried this line of thought to its logical extreme when he attacked the fundamental assumptions of capitalism and democracy by arguing that the working class of advanced industrial countries like Great Britain would be better off under slavery. For Fitzhugh and other Southern defenders of a reactionary seigniorialism, the patriarchal plantation was the best model for society in general, because the cement of all enduring social relationships was the pattern of responsibility and dependence that existed in the family and on the idealized plantation. Their attack on "free society" was based

30. *Pro-Slavery Argument*, p. 436.

31. "Harper on Slavery," *ibid.*, pp. 35-36, 49-50 (originally published as *Memoir on Slavery* [Charleston, 1838]).

28. Cobb, *Inquiry*, p. 39.

29. Sawyer, *Institutes*, p. 222.

on the claim that a lack of such relationships led inevitably to misery, anarchy, and revolution.³²

Fitzhugh was aware that his whole reactionary social philosophy would be undermined if slavery were justified principally in terms of racial differences; hence in his writings of the mid-1850s, he was emphatic in his assertion that the South must be willing to defend slavery in general and not just for blacks. "The strongest argument against slavery, and all the prejudice against it," he wrote in 1857, "arise from the too great inferiority of race, which begets cruel and negligent treatment in the masters, who naturally feel little sympathy for ignorant, brutal savages. Inferiority of race is quite as good an argument against slavery as in its favor." "The whole history of the institution," he concluded, "shows that in giving up slavery in the abstract, we take the weakest position of defense that we could possibly select. We admit it to be wrong and then attempt to defend it in that peculiar form that has always been most odious to mankind."³³

Fitzhugh's concern with this ideological problem suggested that many people in the South had not in fact taken his high ground and were trying to justify slavery on what he considered for the view that slavery was rooted in the peculiar nature of the Negro rather than in ultraconservative concepts of society and government was a popular one. James D. B. De Bow, editor of *De Bow's Review*, a major source of proslavery doctrine, encouraged Fitzhugh's assault on a free society and liberal ideas, but he also opened his journal to the ethnological school and actively endorsed the views of men like Cartwright, Josiah C. Nott, and John H. Van Evrie who defended slavery almost exclusively on the basis of racist anthropology, arguing that the Negro was so radically inferior to the Caucasian that his destiny in America was either brute servitude or extermination. The Biblical curse of Ham could serve almost as well, and in the hands of writers like Matthew Estes and Josiah Priest, it became a judgment of God.

32. Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South and Cannibals All*, passim. See also Henry Hughes, *Treatise on Sociology: Theoretical and Practical* (Philadelphia, 1854), for a different formulation of the same basic argument.

33. George Fitzhugh, "Southern Thought Again," *De Bow's Review*, XXIII (November, 1857), 451.

which placed the black man virtually beyond the pale of humanity.³⁴

If Fitzhugh envisioned a seigniorial society based on the image of a patriarchal plantation, the militant racists implicitly or explicitly projected a democratic and egalitarian society for whites, denying that the blacks were, in any real sense at all, part of the human community. They were advocates of what the sociologist Pierre L. van den Berghe has called "Herrnvolk democracy." In his comparative study of racism, van den Berghe has contrasted "Herrnvolk democracies"—"regimes like those of the United States or South Africa that are democratic for the master race but tyrannical for the subordinate groups"—with genuinely aristocratic multiracial societies like those of colonial Latin America.³⁵ The conflict between a developing *Herrnvolk* ideology and an aristocratic or seigniorial philosophy theoretically incompatible with democracy served to divide the mind of the Old South. To understand this conflict, one must recognize that Southerners could mean two different things when they questioned the applicability of the Declaration of Independence. They could reject the idea of equality in general, like Chancellor Harper and Fitzhugh, or they could reject simply the interpretation of it which included the Negro as a man created equal to the whites. Those who embraced the second option saw themselves as preserving the egalitarian philosophy as a white prerogative. This latter view was stated succinctly by the Alabama fire-eater William L. Yancey before a Northern audience in 1860: "Your fathers and my fathers built this government on two ideas: the first is that the white race is the equal of every other white man. The second idea is that the Negro is the inferior race."³⁶ In the same year, a writer in the *Southern Literary Messenger* made a similar point of more on De Bow and the ethnological school see Chapter Three below. The virulently racist use of the curse of Ham was most strikingly manifested in Josiah Priest's *Slavery, As It Relates to the Negro* (1843), reissued as *Bible Defense of Slavery* . . . (Glasgow, Ky., 1852). See also Estes, *Defense of Negro Slavery*.

34. For more on De Bow and the ethnological school see Chapter Three below.

35. Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective* (New York, 1967), pp. 17-18.

36. Excerpts from a speech of Yancey in Boston, October 12, 1860, in the *Liberator*, October 26, 1860.

point in an historical analysis of slavery. Unlike the paternalists, he condemned ancient slavery and medieval serfdom in principle, because under such systems "races richly endowed by nature, and designed for high and lofty purposes, were kept from rising to their natural level." But all forms of white servitude and subordination had fallen before "the progress of truth, justice, and Christianity." Negro slavery, on the other hand, had persisted because it was not really incompatible with the growth of liberty and equality.³⁷

Southerners often went further and contended that Negro slavery was not only compatible with white equality but was the very foundation of it. Governor Henry A. Wise of Virginia contended that true equality could exist among whites only where black servitude existed. "Break down slavery," he argued, "and you would with the same blow destroy the great democratic principle of equality among men."³⁸ The claim was frequently made that the white South had no recognized social classes; that far from establishing an aristocracy of slaveholders, as the abolitionists claimed, it put all white men, whether they owned slaves or not, on a dead level. Thomas R. R. Cobb described the lower-class whites of the South as having the sense of belonging "to an elevated class": "It matters not that he is no slaveholder; he is not of the inferior race; he is a freeborn citizen. . . . The poorest meets the richest as an equal; sits at the table with him; salutes him as a neighbor; meets him at a public assembly, and stands on the same social platform."³⁹

Such observations obviously reflected a social ideal radically at variance with the image of the South as a seigneurial or quasi-feudal society. The proponents of this view made racial consciousness the foundation and cement of Southern society and not an incidental aspect. It was carried to its logical extreme in the writings of Dr. John H. Van Evrie, a proslavery New York physician and editor whose views were widely hailed in the

37. "The Negro Races," the *Southern Literary Messenger*, XXXI (July, 1860), 9-10.

38. Quoted in Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought*, p. 190.

39. Cobb, *Inquiry*, p. 213. This statement of Cobb and those of several other prominent Southern spokesmen who made the same points are quoted in Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought*, pp. 190-194.

South. In the 1853 pamphlet version of his *Negroes and Negro "Slavery,"* which carried on the cover the enthusiastic endorsements of Jefferson Davis, J. D. B. De Bow, and other prominent Southern spokesmen, Van Evrie combined arguments for the biological inequality of the blacks with a vigorous attack on all past or present forms of class privilege and social hierarchy within homogeneous white societies. He denounced with particular emphasis the oppression of British peasants and laborers by an "aristocracy" that was not naturally superior to those it governed. Having condemned all forms of subordination of whites to other whites as "artificial" and unjust, Van Evrie then relegated the blacks to abject and perpetual servitude for one reason alone—because they constituted a permanently inferior biological species. He even attacked those proslavery writers who attempted "to defend Southern institutions by comparing the condition of the Negro with the condition of the British laborer," because "no comparison is allowable or possible":

The Negro is governed by those *naturally* superior, and is in the *best* condition of any portion or branch of his race, while the British laborer, governed by those *naturally* his equals, and even sometimes his inferiors, is in the *worst* condition of any portion of *his* race. The first is secure in all the rights that nature gives him, the latter is *practically* denied all or nearly all of his—the first is protected and provided for by those the Creator has designed should govern him, the latter is kept in ignorance, brutalized, over worked and plundered by those who it is designed should only *govern themselves*—one is a *normal condition*, the other an *infamous usurpation*.⁴⁰

The most famous and authoritative statement of the principle that hierarchical subordination should always be strictly reserved for inferior races appeared in Alexander H. Stephens's famous "Cornerstone Speech" of 1861, heralding the foundation of the Confederacy. "Many governments," said the newly elected Vice

40. John H. Van Evrie, pamphlet *Negroes and Negro "Slavery": The First an Inferior Race: The Latter Its Normal Condition* (Baltimore, 1853), pp. 30-31 and *passim*. Van Evrie's doctrines as elaborated in the later book of the same title will be discussed more extensively in Chapter Three as applications of the "scientific" racism that burgeoned in the North as well as in the South during the 1850s.

President of the Confederate States of America, "have been founded on the principles of subordination and serfdom of certain classes of the same race; *such were, and are in violation of the laws of nature.* Our system commits no such violation of nature's laws. With us, all the white race, however high or low, rich or poor, are equal in the eyes of the law. Not so with the Negro. Subordination is his place. He, by nature, or by the curse against Canaan, is fitted for that condition which he occupies in our system." As for the basis of the new Confederate government: "Its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man, that slavery—subordination to the superior race—is his natural or normal condition."⁴¹

IV

Empirically speaking, Southern slavery was both an example of slavery in general and a form of servitude strictly limited to a single and supposedly inferior race. Two qualities about his laborers were thus bound to impress themselves upon the slaveholder's consciousness—that they were slaves and that they were black. On an unreflective attitudinal level these two aspects of the situation could coexist, reinforcing each other by creating a disposition to defend slavery because it was simultaneously the basis of concrete economic and social privilege for a class of Southerners and the institutional underpinning for a psychologically satisfying sense of racial superiority. But, as we have seen, the attempt to develop a consistent philosophical defense of the institution led inevitably to efforts to derive the argument principally from one facet or the other. Emphasis on slavery per se as an organizing principle of society led to a genuinely reactionary and paternalistic theory of society; but if racial differentiation was seen as the heart of the matter, then the result, in the larger American ideological context, was "Herrenvolk democracy" or "egallitarian" racism.

41. Henry Cleveland, *Alexander H. Stephens, In Public and Private: With Letters and Speeches, Before, During, and Since the War* (Philadelphia, 1866), pp. 722-723, 721. (The italics are mine.)

The elaborate intellectual efforts of writers like Fitzhugh and Henry Hughes (the Mississippi "sociologist") to prove that the "ethical qualification" in the South's system of labor was "accidental,"⁴² can perhaps best be seen as an attempt to articulate the genuinely antidemocratic aspirations of an elite of large planters by legitimizing in the abstract the self-serving principle of aristocratic domination. There is undoubtedly some truth in Eugene Genovese's assertion that the master-slave relationship and the plantation environment tended by their very nature to produce a class with "an aristocratic, antibourgeois spirit with values and mores emphasizing family and status, a strong code of honor, and aspirations to luxury, ease, and accomplishment."⁴³ Fitzhugh, Hughes, and other aristocratic paternalists with similar if less highly developed views—men like Edmund Ruffin, William J. Grayson, and George Frederick Holmes—probably did express, in some sense, the deeper impulses of the South's upper class, "the logical outcome" of its social thinking.⁴⁴

It is doubtful, however, that these aristocratic proslavery theorists produced a coherent world view that placed the South as a whole on the road to accepting a reactionary class ideology as opposed to a modern type of race ideology. First of all, these thinkers betrayed their own ambivalence by giving greater attention to racial inferiority as a justification of Southern slavery than their general theory actually required. Although Hughes had described the racial factor as an "accidental" element in the Southern labor system, he went on to argue at some length that subordination of the blacks in the South was essential to prevent amalgamation and preserve the purity of the white race;

42. Hughes, *Treatise*, p. 42.

43. Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York, 1965), p. 28.

44. See Edmund Ruffin, *The Political Economy of Slavery* (1859); William J. Grayson, *The Hiring and the Slave* . . . (Charleston, 1856); and Robert L. Dabney, *A Defense of Virginia* . . . (New York, 1867). For a provocative discussion of Fitzhugh's thought as the natural outgrowth of the slaveholder's situation, see Part Two of Eugene Genovese's *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York, 1969). For reasons that will become clear, however, I dissent from Genovese's thesis that the reactionary, consistently antidemocratic slaveholder's philosophy was the dominant world view that emerged from the antebellum South.

Edmund Ruffin combined universalist arguments for slavery with a full rendition of the historical thesis that blacks as a race had demonstrated a peculiar intellectual inferiority and incapacity for freedom; even Fitzhugh maintained that the inherent "child-like" character of the Negro was in itself a persuasive argument for his enslavement.⁴⁵

Moreover, it is questionable that even an "ethnically qualified" argument for aristocracy and slavery as being good in themselves won very many adherents outside a circle of slaveholding intellectuals who seemed alienated to some extent from their society and were without a determining influence on Southern politics or the formation of public opinion. Some of these theorists severely limited their own influence by openly manifesting from the extension of democratic procedures and attitudes during the Jacksonian period. Among the older paternalistic theorists, Ruffin and Grayson belonged to the group that William R. Taylor describes as "Southern mugwumps," men who had retreated from politics in the 1820s and 1830s, partly because of their temperamental and ideological opposition to the changing character of public life. It also is noteworthy that most of the paternalist ideologues were from Virginia and South Carolina, the most conservative Southern states. Their point of view was not so commonly expressed by the proslavery apologists of the newer and increasingly dominant Southwestern states, where a quasi-democratic ethos and a forthright emphasis on "Herren-volk" solidarity were made evident.⁴⁶

The overwhelming majority of antebellum Southerners, it should be recalled, either owned no slaves or were farmers who owned only a few. Although many undoubtedly aspired to become planters, there is little indication that they accepted a reactionary social philosophy or even understood it. On the contrary,

45. Hughes, *Treatise*, pp. 238-243; Ruffin, *Political Economy*, pp. 10-19; Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South*, pp. 82-83, and *Cannibals All*, p. 20.

46. William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York, 1961), pp. 55-65. Edmund Ruffin's eschewal of a public career in the face of "democratic" tendencies that he refused to accept is further documented in Avery O. Craven's *Edmund Ruffin, Southerner* (New York and London, 1932), pp. 39-43.

most signs would suggest that for intraracial purposes they were fiercely democratic in their political and social thinking, strongly opposed to any formal recognition of the principle of aristocracy among whites. The reactionary elements of the planter class could not readily force their values on such a population, because political democracy in the Old South, and particularly in the Southwest, was no sham: universal white manhood suffrage existed in most states during the late antebellum period, and candidates closely identified with a "black belt" or planter interest were sometimes defeated in bitterly contested elections which revealed a vigorous two-party system and a high level of popular interest and participation. The "plain folk," mostly stiff-necked back-country farmers with their own frontier-type traditions, were not, despite their relative poverty, economically or socially dependent, in any full sense, on the planter elite; and with the extension of the suffrage in the 1830s this element acquired a political leverage that required some upper-class accommodation.⁴⁷

47. That the Old South experienced a "democratic revolution" (for whites only) during the Jacksonian period has been argued most effectively by Fletcher M. Green and Charles S. Sydnor (see Green, *Democracy in the Old South and Other Essays*, ed. J. Isaac Copeland [Nashville, 1969], pp. 65-86; and Sydnor, *The Development of Southern Sectionalism 1819-1848* [Baton Rouge, La., 1948], Chapter XII), and has been reiterated in Clement Eaton's *The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790-1860* (New York, 1961), pp. 172-175, 308-309. These historians recognize that this "democratization" was largely political and did not in the end undermine the social and economic dominance of the planter class, but contend that it did force the elite to adjust to the new order because it impelled them to profess a "democratic" ideology and to work through democratic electoral processes. Green and Sydnor have probably overstated their thesis because they have paid too little attention to persistently conservative and aristocratic facets of Southern life. But recent historians of basically Marxist orientation, such as Eugene Genovese and Barrington Moore, Jr. (see Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* [Boston, 1966], Chapter Three), have gone to the other extreme by overlooking almost entirely the fact that the Old South had even a limited democratic aspect. They seem to imply that the planters ruled pretty much like the hereditary aristocracy of a typical premodern and hierarchical agrarian society. It admittedly strains credulity to describe the Old South as having been in any profound sense democratic or egalitarian. There were immense inequalities not only between masters and slaves but also between rich planters and much of the nonslaveholding population. But it seems clear that the late antebellum Southern oligarchy lacked the aura of unquestioned legitimacy

In the end, therefore, the planter class, whatever its own inner feelings, endeavored to maintain its *de facto* hegemony by making a "democratic" appeal, one which took into account the beliefs, desires, and phobias of an enfranchised nonslaveholding majority. No successful Southern politician, whatever his ties to the "aristocracy," was able to talk like Fitzhugh and give theoretical sanction to the enslavement or subordination of whites. When politicians justified slavery, they almost invariably did so largely in terms of race; the nonslaveholders feared blacks as potential competitors and opposed emancipation as a threat to their own "equal" status as whites. Because of inherent limitations on their ability to rule as they saw fit, the dominant class had to be content with a public defense of slavery that contradicted any consistently aristocratic pretensions they may have had; for they recognized that efforts to sanction white servitude in the abstract might endanger black servitude as a concrete reality. The fundamental insecurity that made such an adjustment mandatory was revealed by the hysterical reaction of Southern conservatives to the publication in 1857 of Hinton Rowan Helper's *The Impending Crisis of the South*, an attack on the slave system from a lower-class white point of view.⁴⁸ Not at all sure of the adherence of nonslaveholding whites to slavery itself, much less to a reactionary view of its implications, spokesmen for the planter class were generally willing to gain the necessary support for their concrete interests on any platform that would sanction them, even if it sacrificed their full ideological ambitions. In the last analysis, therefore, *Herrenvolk* egalitarianism was the dominant public ideology of the South, because it was the only one likely to ensure a consensus.

Spokesmen for the class of large planters were able to endorse such a doctrine without blatant hypocrisy because they themselves had never denied that inferiority of race was one justification of slavery. It has already been noted that Fitzhugh, who had

that surrounds an established seigniorial class with a privileged status recognized and accepted by the community as a whole.

48. This reaction is discussed in the introduction to Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It*, ed. George M. Fredrickson (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. xv-xix.

49. *Idem*

tried harder than anyone to confine racial differences within an ultraconservative social perspective—as only one example of the manifold inequalities which ought to be reflected in paternalistic institutions—had nevertheless always argued that the inherent characteristics of the Negro race made its enslavement both natural and necessary. And at the very end of the antebellum period, when the sectional conflict was approaching its climax, Fitzhugh himself put an increasing stress on the racial factor and consented to an enlargement of the theoretical gap between the races. Indeed, one of the most dramatic indications that the effort to develop and promulgate a genuinely paternalistic world view was aborted by concessions to racism and Negrophobia can be found in the shifting emphasis in Fitzhugh's writings between 1857 and 1861. In 1857 Fitzhugh had warned against a defense of slavery that relied on "too great inferiority of race." But in his 1859 article "Free Negroes in Hayti," he revealed his own growing interest in racial doctrines. Paying tribute to "ethnology," a study almost neglected fifty years since, "which had now 'been elevated to the dignity of a science,'" he went on to describe how Haitian blacks were "relapsing into their former savage state." In support of the view that Haitian "degeneration" revealed basic Negro traits, he cited Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, the father of modern European racism, whose book *The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races* was published in the United States in 1856. But Fitzhugh still held back from an unequivocal endorsement of Gobineau's assertion that Negroes had an absolutely fixed and unchangeable set of undesirable traits. He acknowledged that the Haitian experience demonstrated the current inability of the Negro to make progress under freedom but intimated that it was still an open question what might eventually be made of him under slavery.⁴⁹ In 1861, however, Fitzhugh announced his capitulation to extreme racism. In a review of Van Evrie's *Negroes and Negro "Slavery,"* in book form, Fitzhugh concluded that Van Evrie had provided "demonstrative reasoning, demonstrative proof, that the negro is of a different species, physically, from the white man. He then shows that the

49. George Fitzhugh, "Free Negroes in Hayti," *De Bow's Review*, XXVII (November, 1859), 527-549.