

George Fitzhugh Questions

1. Fitzhugh begins his work by writing, “Society has been so quiet and contented in the South – it has suffered so little from crime or extreme poverty...” (p.100). Do you agree with this observation? Is Fitzhugh misrepresenting the antebellum south? Why or why not?
2. What are Fitzhugh’s objections to capitalism? Critiquing liberalism, Fitzhugh writes of Adam Smith’s philosophy and its impact, “But there was another and much larger world, whose misfortunes, under his system, were to make the fortunes of friends and his country” (p.100-101). Can you draw comparisons with this statement and trade between developed and non-developed nations today? Does a free market favor the already strong?
3. Do you believe that, “Trade is a war of the wits, in which the stronger witted are as sure to succeed as the stronger armed in a way with swords” (p.101)? How else might trade derive its purpose?
4. What can we imply of Fitzhugh’s assumptions regarding human nature when he writes, “the public good, the welfare of society, the prosperity of one’s neighbors is, according to them, best promoted by each man’s looking solely to the advancement of his own pecuniary interest” (p.101)? Or that free markets are “of simple and unadulterated selfishness” (p.101)?
5. Do you think that capitalism necessarily leads to a “war of the rich with the poor and the poor with one another” (p.101). Is class struggle, as Fitzhugh suggests, unavoidable in a free market system? Should class struggle be permitted?
6. What is expected of women in such a society? Do women suffer more in such a system as is suggested? (p.102)
7. What are the disadvantages of a system where, “the individual was considered nothing, the state every thing” (p.102) with an emphasis on the common good?
8. What are your major objections to the argument that, “slavery is a form, and the very best form, of socialism” (p.103)? What would his definition of slavery be?
9. Which do you believe is better for all individuals to thrive under, more, or less government?
10. Are we all slaves to something? If no, what distinguishes us from slaves? Or is it a part of human nature? (104-105)
11. Is a less democratic, despotic government, necessary for “a people either very ignorant or very wicked” (p.105). Does our own Constitution support or negate this idea? What would the founding fathers say about Fitzhugh’s arguments?
12. What does Fitzhugh believe will happen to the arts in a capitalist society? (106)