



## Tom Cotton's Disgraceful Slavery Rhetoric

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Richard Cherwitz

Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton is among the many well-educated members of the U.S. congress. However, when he ridiculously claimed that "slavery was a necessary evil," his ignorance and arrogance were starkly revealed. Make no mistake, President Abraham Lincoln viewed slavery as an inherent evil that must be solved but never would have seen it as a "necessary evil."

Unlike Lincoln, Cotton does not understand and take to heart the principles of our founding fathers and Constitution. Though the founding fathers no doubt were divided on the issue of slavery, with some of them having owned slaves and others being opposed to it, there is no evidence documenting that any of them argued slavery in the US was a "necessary evil."

But this may not be the end of the story. Former Senator Al Franken's web page claims that Cotton told The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette that "the Holocaust was also a necessary evil." Says Franken, "Appearing on the Fox News Channel's morning show *Fox and Friends*, Cotton justified his remarks, arguing that 'absent the Holocaust, Israel would not be a country today.'" Assuming Franken's post is not a parody, there could be no end to the Senator's inappropriate and disgraceful rhetoric.

In view only of his comments on slavery, however, Cotton's decency and humanity are in scarce supply—something that should deeply trouble all Arkansans, Americans and legislative leaders regardless of political ideology or party preference. We should no longer tolerate and remain silent about such dangerous rhetoric.

Moreover, Cotton's pitching a bill to prohibit use of federal funds to teach the 1619 Project is silly, exposing a total lack of awareness of the purpose of history. Let's start with the facts, not the propaganda.

The 1619 Project is an ongoing project developed by The New York Times Magazine in 2019 with the goal of re-examining the legacy of slavery in the United States and timed for the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in the Virginia colony. It is an interactive project directed by Nikole Hannah-Jones, a reporter for The New York Times, with contributions by the newspaper's writers, including essays on the history of different aspects of contemporary American life which the authors believe have "roots in slavery and its aftermath." In 2020, Hannah-Jones won a Pulitzer Prize for her commentary on the 1619 Project.

Contrary to Cotton's false declaration, the 1619 Project is not "a racially divisive, revisionist account of history that denies the noble principles of freedom and equality on which our nation was founded." Rather, it is a unique pedagogy for enlightening students and making them aware of complex historical realities that include many stories and perspectives. In short, it does not "indoctrinate young Americans with this left-wing garbage," as Cotton suggests. Just the opposite.

This kind of inflammatory and culturally divisive discourse by Cotton—and perhaps others—only exacerbates and perpetuates our current racial problems. In view of the growing awareness of the real meaning of the Black Lives Matter movement, which reminds us of the long-held racial injustices and inequities that continue to plague the nation, Cotton's words are especially repugnant.

One thing about which we can be certain: Cotton is a prototypical example of why graduating from Harvard does not mean we should assume one is an intelligent, sensitive and astute public servant worthy of holding government office. After all, it doesn't require a fancy Ivy League pedigree to know what is right and in the best interest of the country.

*Richard Cherwitz is the Ernest S. Sharpe Centennial Professor Emeritus in the Moody College of Communication and Founder of the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Consortium (IE), University of Texas at Austin.*