

# 3 Conflicts Over States' Rights

## TERMS & NAMES

John C. Calhoun  
 Tariff of Abominations  
 doctrine of nullification  
 Webster-Hayne debate  
 Daniel Webster  
 secession

### MAIN IDEA

Jackson struggled to keep Southern states from breaking away from the Union over the issue of tariffs.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Disputes about states' rights and federal power remain important in national politics.

## ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Early in his political career, **John C. Calhoun** was hailed as "one of the master-spirits who stamp their name upon the age in which they live." This was praise indeed for someone from the backwoods of South Carolina who had little formal education before age 18. Elected to the U.S. Congress at 28, Calhoun soon was one of its leaders. He supported the need for a strong central government and became something of a hero to the nation's young people. He spoke out against sectionalism.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

What is necessary for the common good may apparently be opposed to the interest of particular sections. It must be submitted to [accepted] as the condition of our [nation's] greatness.

**John C. Calhoun**, quoted in *John C. Calhoun: American Portrait* by Margaret L. Coit

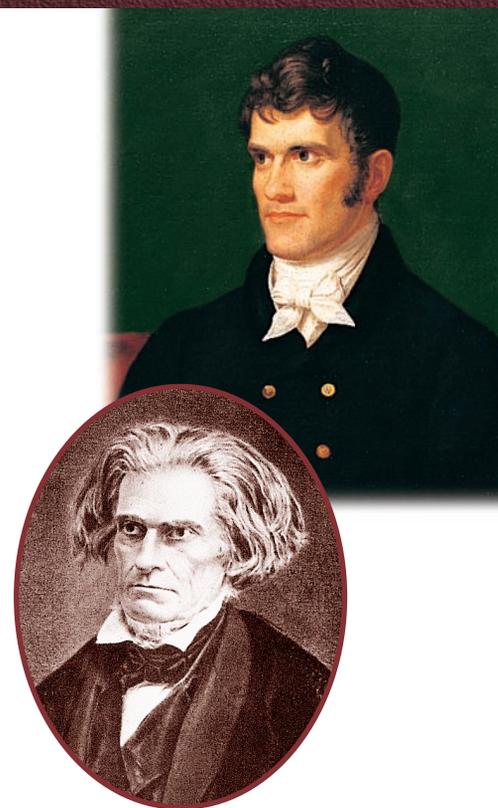
But Calhoun's concern for the economic and political well-being of his home state of South Carolina, and the South in general, later caused him to change his beliefs. He became the foremost champion of states' rights, rigid in his views and increasingly bitter.

In this section, you will learn how two strong-willed men—Calhoun and Jackson—came in conflict over the issue of states' rights.

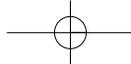
## Rising Sectional Differences

Andrew Jackson had taken office in 1829. At the time, the country was being pulled apart by conflicts among its three main sections—the Northeast, the South, and the West. Legislators from these regions were arguing over three major economic issues: the sale of public lands, internal improvements, and tariffs.

The federal government had acquired vast areas of land through conquests, treaties, and purchases. It raised money partly by selling these public lands. However, Northeasterners did not want public lands in the West to be sold at low prices. The cheap land would attract workers who were needed in the factories of the Northeast. But Westerners wanted



The bitter debate over states' rights took a physical toll on John C. Calhoun. He is shown here in about 1825 and in 1849.



low land prices to encourage settlement. The more people who moved West, the more political power the section would have.

The issue of internal improvements also pulled the sections apart. Business leaders in the Northeast and West backed government spending on internal improvements, such as new roads and canals. Good transportation would help bring food and raw materials to the Northeast and take manufactured goods to Western markets. Southerners opposed more federal spending on internal improvements because the government financed these projects through tariffs, which were taxes on imported goods. The South did not want any increase in tariffs.

Since 1816, tariffs had risen steadily. They had become the government's main source of income. Northerners supported high tariffs because they made imported goods more expensive than American-made goods. The Northeast had most of the nation's manufacturing. Tariffs helped

### Background

During the Jackson era, the West included states that are now considered part of the Midwest.

## Economics *in* History

### How Tariffs Work

Tariffs are taxes added to the cost of goods imported from another country. There are two kinds of tariffs—revenue tariffs and protective tariffs. **Revenue tariffs** are used to raise money, like the sales taxes that states add to purchases today. These tariffs tend to be fairly low. **Protective tariffs** usually are much higher. They have another goal: to persuade consumers to buy goods made in their own country instead of purchasing foreign-made products. Congress passed a protective tariff in 1828 to help American companies.

The illustration shows how a protective tariff works. A British-made teapot sells for \$3.50, and a similar teapot made in the United States sells for \$4.00. Most shoppers will buy the British teapot and save 50 cents. But when the government adds a 40 percent tariff to British goods, the price of the British teapot soars to \$4.90. The result: consumers buy the now-cheaper American teapots.

### CONNECT TO HISTORY

1. **Recognizing Effects** Do consumers benefit from high tariffs? Why or why not?

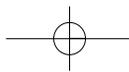
See Skillbuilder Handbook, page R11.

### CONNECT TO TODAY

2. **Making Inferences** Today, many leaders around the world promote the idea of "free trade." What do you think "free trade" means?

For more about tariffs . . .





### ReadingHistory

#### A. Analyzing

**Causes** Why did the three sections of the country differ on the sale of public lands, internal improvements, and tariffs?

American manufacturers sell their products at a lower price than imported goods.

The South opposed rising tariffs because its economy depended on foreign trade. Southern planters sold most of their cotton to foreign buyers. They were not paid in money but were given credit. They then used the credit to buy foreign manufactured goods. Because of higher tariffs, these foreign goods cost more. Eventually, the tariff issue would lead to conflict between North and South.

## Tariff of Abominations

In 1828, in the last months of John Quincy Adams's presidency, Congress passed a bill that significantly raised the tariffs on raw materials and manufactured goods. Southerners were outraged. They had to sell their cotton at low prices to be competitive. Yet tariffs forced them to pay high prices for manufactured goods. Southerners felt that the economic interests of the Northeast were determining national policy. They hated the tariff and called it the **Tariff of Abominations** (an abomination is a hateful thing).

Differences over the tariff helped Jackson win the election of 1828. Southerners blamed Adams for the tariff, since it was passed during his administration. So they voted against him.

## Crisis over Nullification

The Tariff of Abominations hit South Carolinians especially hard because their economy was in a slump. Some leaders in the state even spoke of leaving the Union over the issue of tariffs. John C. Calhoun, then Jackson's vice-president, understood the problems of South Carolina's farmers because he was one himself. But he wanted to find a way to keep South Carolina from leaving the Union. The answer he arrived at was the **doctrine of nullification**. A state, Calhoun said, had the right to nullify, or reject, a federal law that it considers unconstitutional.

Calhoun was not the first person to propose the doctrine of nullification. Thomas Jefferson developed it in 1799 in the Kentucky Resolutions. He argued that the Union was a league of sovereign, or self-governing, states that had the right to limit the federal government. Calhoun extended the doctrine. He said that any state could nullify, or make void, a federal law within its borders. He believed that Congress had no right to impose a tariff that favored one section of the country. Therefore, South Carolina had the right to nullify the tariff. Calhoun's doctrine was an extreme form of states' rights—the theory that states have the right to judge whether a law of Congress is unconstitutional.

In the summer of 1828, Calhoun wrote a document called the "South Carolina Exposition and Protest." It stated his theory. Calhoun allowed the document to be published, but he did not sign his name. He knew his ideas would cause controversy.



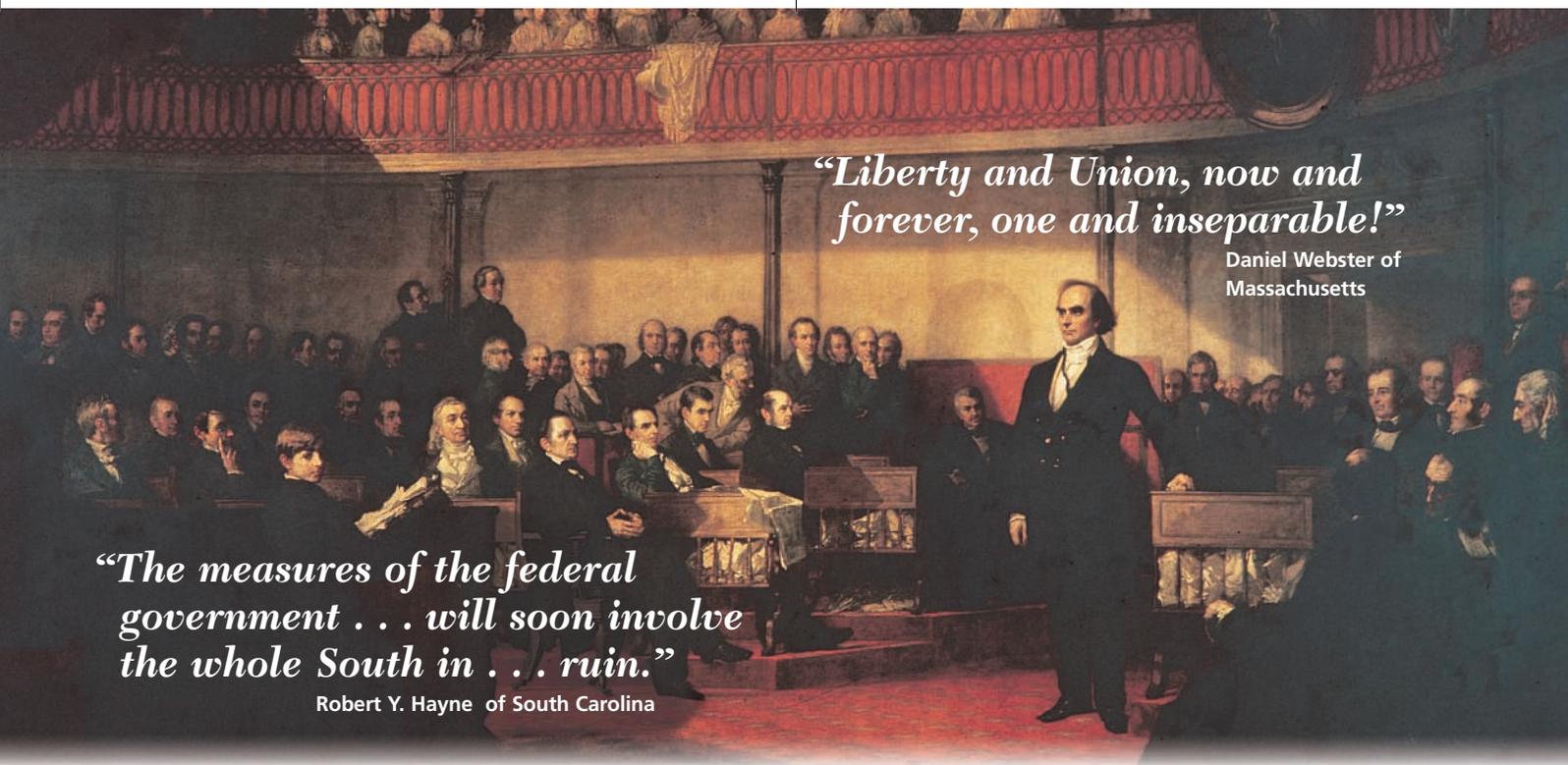
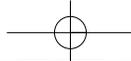
A South Carolina woman sews a palmetto emblem (inset) to her hat to show her support for nullification. The palmetto is a South Carolina symbol.

### ReadingHistory

#### B. Summarizing

How did the issue of tariffs threaten to tear the Union apart?

**Vocabulary**  
**controversy:** a public dispute



*“Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!”*

Daniel Webster of Massachusetts

*“The measures of the federal government . . . will soon involve the whole South in . . . ruin.”*

Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina

Daniel Webster (standing) and Robert Y. Hayne (seated, with hands extended) debated nullification in the U.S. Senate in 1830.

## The States' Rights Debate

Calhoun was right. His ideas added fuel to the debate over the nature of the federal union. This debate had been going on since independence from Britain. More and more people took sides. Some supported a strong federal government. Others defended the rights of the states. This question would be a major political issue from this time until the Civil War was fought to resolve it some 30 years later.

One of the great debates in American history took place in the U.S. Senate over the doctrine of nullification—the **Webster-Hayne debate** of 1830. On one side was **Daniel Webster**, a senator from Massachusetts and the most powerful speaker of his time. On the other was Robert Y. Hayne, a senator from South Carolina. Hayne defended nullification. He argued that it gave the states a lawful way to protest and to maintain their freedom. He also said that the real enemies of the Union were those “who are constantly stealing power from the States, and adding strength to the Federal Government.”

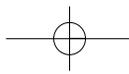
Webster argued that it was the people and not the states that made the Union. In words that were printed and spread across the country, Webster declared that freedom and the Union go together.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

When my eyes shall be turned to behold for the last time the sun in heaven, may I not see him shining on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union. . . Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!

**Daniel Webster**, a speech in the U.S. Senate, January 26, 1830

Jackson had not yet stated his position on the issue of states' rights, even though Calhoun was his vice-president. He got his chance in April at a dinner in honor of the birthday of Thomas Jefferson. Calhoun and other



**ReadingHistory**

**C. Analyzing**

**Points of View**

What do you think Calhoun meant by “the benefits and burdens of the Union” should be equally distributed?

supporters of nullification planned to use the event to win support for their position. Jackson learned of their plans and went to the dinner prepared.

After dinner, Jackson was invited to make a toast. He stood up, looked directly at Calhoun, and stated bluntly, “Our Federal Union—it must be preserved.” As Calhoun raised his glass, his hand trembled. Called on to make the next toast, Calhoun stood slowly and said, “The Union—next to our liberty, the most dear; may we all remember that it can only be preserved by respecting the rights of the states and distributing equally the benefits and burdens of the Union.” From that time, the two men were political enemies.

**South Carolina Threatens to Secede**

Even though Jackson made it clear that he opposed the doctrine of nullification, he did not want to drive the South out of the Union. He asked Congress to reduce the tariff, and Congress did so in 1832. But Southerners thought the reduced rates were still too high. South Carolina nullified the tariff acts of 1828 and 1832 and voted to build its own army. South Carolina’s leaders threatened **secession**, or withdrawal from the Union, if the federal government tried to collect tariffs.

Jackson was enraged. He told a South Carolina congressman that if the state’s leaders defied federal laws, he would “hang the first man of them I can get my hands on.” Jackson ran for reelection in 1832, this time without Calhoun as his running mate. After he won, he made it clear that he would use force to see that federal laws were obeyed and the Union preserved.

In the Senate, Henry Clay came forward with a compromise tariff in 1833. He hoped that it would settle the issue and prevent bloodshed. Congress quickly passed the bill, and the crisis ended. South Carolina stayed in the Union. In the next section, you will read about another issue of Jackson’s presidency—his war on the national bank.

**Section 3 Assessment**

**1. Terms & Names**

**Explain the significance of:**

- John C. Calhoun
- Tariff of Abominations
- doctrine of nullification
- Webster-Hayne debate
- Daniel Webster
- secession

**2. Taking Notes**

Use a chart to indicate how each section stood on these issues.

	North-east	West	South
Sale of public lands			
Internal improvements			
High tariffs			

**3. Main Ideas**

- a.** Why did the South oppose high tariffs?
- b.** What were Calhoun’s reasons for proposing the doctrine of nullification?
- c.** Why did South Carolina threaten secession, and how was the crisis resolved?

**4. Critical Thinking**

**Recognizing Effects** In what ways would the doctrine of nullification have made it difficult for the federal government to operate?

**THINK ABOUT**

- its effect on the enforcement of laws
- its effect on the power of the federal government

**ACTIVITY OPTIONS**

**SPEECH**

**TECHNOLOGY**

Research Daniel Webster’s speech; a part of it appears on page 382. Deliver a **speech** for or against nullification to the class, or record it on an **audiocassette**.