

Class

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### The Nullification Crisis

Jackson's spoils system and the removal of the Indians were both popular policies. His third move, however, did not please his supporters in the South. In 1828 Congress raised tariff rates to a new high. This was done to protect the industries of the Northeast.

Vice-President John C. Calhoun led a strong attack on the tariff law. He based his opinions on the theory of states' rights, the idea that some powers were reserved for the states. Calhoun carried the idea of states' rights to a new extreme.

According to Calhoun, the Constitution was an agreement among the states. Therefore, the states, rather than the Supreme Court, should have the power to decide what the Constitution means. If a state thought that a federal law violated the Constitution, it should be able to nullify (kill) the law. The protective tariff, Calhoun said, should be nullified because it helped one section of the country at the expense of the others.

Daniel Webster, a noted Senator from Massachusetts, made a stirring reply to Calhoun's arguments. Webster said that the federal union had been created by the people, not by the states. If every state was free to disobey federal laws, the United States would return to the unhappy conditions existing under the Articles of Confederation. This would mean disagreements among the states, civil wars, and finally the breakup of the Union.

Calhoun expected Jackson, who was known as a "states' rights man," to back up his southern supporters. To Calhoun's disappointment, Jackson did not support him. Calhoun resigned as Vice-President. South Carolina then elected him to the Senate, where he led the states' rights movement for the next twenty years.

Congress reduced the tariff rates in 1832, but South Carolina was still not satisfied. Its governor called a special convention, which voted to nullify the new tariff act. The convention declared that South Carolina would leave the Union if the federal government tried to collect tariffs within its borders. The governor called for volunteers to fight against any "federal invasion."

Jackson quickly met this challenge. "The laws of the United States must be executed," he warned the people of South Carolina. He asked Congress to give him the right to use the army and navy, if necessary, to enforce federal laws in South Carolina. Privately, he told some members of Congress that he planned to send 50,000 troops into South Carolina. "If one drop of blood be shed their in defiance of the laws of the United States," he said, "I will hang the first man of them I can get my hands on to the first tree I can find."

The threat of civil war soon ended, however, because Henry Clay of Kentucky worked out a compromise settlement. Congress passed a new tariff law, which provided for a gradual lowering of tariff rates to the level of 1816.

President Jackson accepted the compromise, but he did not like it. He had wanted to end the battle over nullification by forcing South Carolina to back down. He saw that the state was encouraged by its success. He predicted that South Carolina would use the threat to secede from the Union again in the years ahead.

1. What did Congress do in 1828 that did NOT please the South?
2. Vice President John C. Calhoun led a strong attack on the tariff law by using the theory of states' rights. In your own words, explain Calhoun's argument in support of nullification of the protective tariff.
3. Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster made a strong argument against states' rights and nullification. Explain Webster's argument in your own words.
4. How did this controversy lead to Calhoun's resignation as vice President?
5. How did South Carolina react when Congress reduced the tariff rates in 1832?
6. What was Andrew Jackson's reaction to South Carolina's threat to secede?
7. The threat of civil war ended because Henry Clay of Kentucky worked out a compromise settlement. What was this settlement?
8. Why was President Jackson dissatisfied with the compromise?