

JOHN C. CALHOUN AND THE DOCTRINE OF NULLIFICATION

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Under Andrew Jackson, John C. Calhoun's vice presidency remained controversial. A rift between Northern and Southern views drove a wedge between Calhoun and Jackson.

The Tariff of 1828, also known as the “Tariff of Abominations” aggravated the rift between Calhoun and the Jacksonians. Calhoun had been assured that Jacksonians would reject the bill, but the Northern Jacksonians were primarily responsible for its passage. Frustrated, he returned to his South Carolina plantation to write *South Carolina Exposition and Protest*, a widely reprinted essay rejecting the philosophy he once advocated.

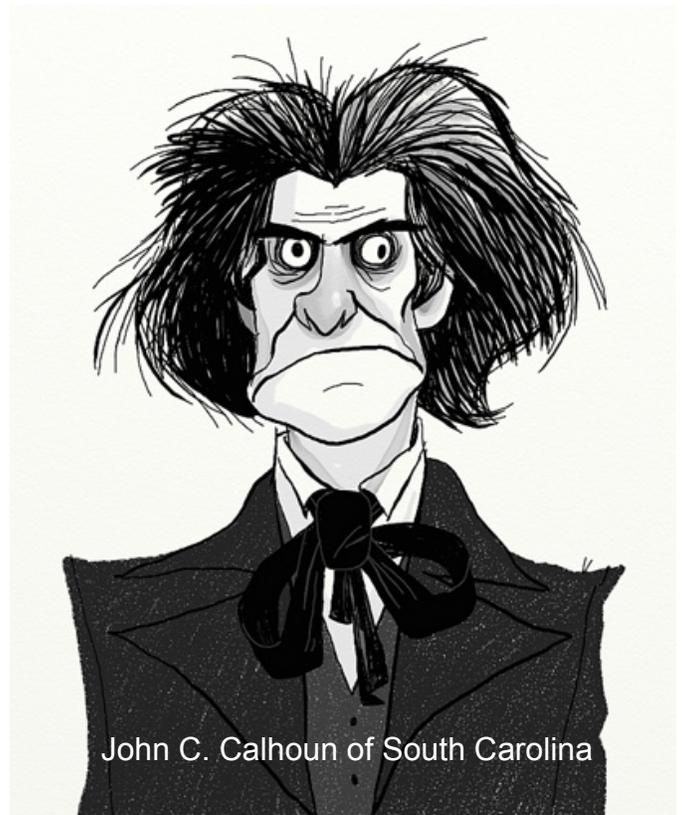
Calhoun now supported an idea known as the **Doctrine of Nullification**—that individual states could override (or nullify) federal laws they deemed unconstitutional.

Nullification traced back to arguments by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison in writings back in 1798, which proposed that states could nullify the Alien and Sedition Acts. President Jackson, who supported states rights, but believed that nullification threatened the union, opposed the idea of nullification.

The difference, however, between Calhoun's arguments and those of Jefferson and Madison, is that Calhoun explicitly argued for the state's right to **secede** from the Union if necessary, instead of simply nullifying certain federal legislation.

In 1832, the states rights theory was put to the test in the **Nullification Crisis** after South Carolina passed an ordinance that claimed to nullify federal tariffs. The tariffs favored Northern manufacturing interests over Southern agricultural concerns, and the South Carolina legislature declared them to be unconstitutional.

In response, Congress passed the Force Bill, which empowered the president to use military power to force states to obey all federal laws, and Jackson sent U.S. Navy warships to Charleston Harbor. South Carolina then nullified the Force Bill. But tensions cooled after both sides agreed to the **Compromise of 1833**, a proposal by Senator Henry Clay to change the tariff law in a manner which



John C. Calhoun of South Carolina

satisfied Calhoun, who by then was in the Senate.

During the Nullification Crisis, President Jackson said in a famous toast, "Our federal Union—it must and shall be preserved." In Vice President Calhoun's toast, he replied, "The Union; next to our liberty most dear!" The irony in this is that Calhoun had argued for the Doctrine of Nullification, anonymously, making his true opinions unknown to Jackson – until that moment.

The break between Jackson and Calhoun was complete, and, in 1832, Calhoun ran for the Senate rather than remain as Vice President.