

Nullification and the Bank War

In 1824 and again in 1828, Congress increased the Tariff of 1816. Jackson's vice president, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, called the 1828 tariff a Tariff of Abominations because he blamed it for economic problems in the South.

The South's economy depended on cotton exports. Yet the high tariff on manufactured goods reduced British exports to the United States, and because of this, Britain bought less cotton. With the decline of British goods, the South was now forced to buy the more expensive Northern manufactured goods. From the South's point of view, the North was getting rich at the expense of the South.

THE NULLIFICATION CRISIS

To try to free South Carolinians from the tariff, Calhoun developed a theory of nullification. Calhoun's theory held that the U.S. Constitution was based on a compact among the sovereign states. If the Constitution had been established by 13 sovereign states, he reasoned, then the states must still be sovereign, and each would have the right to determine whether acts of Congress were constitutional. If a state found an act to be unconstitutional, the state could declare the offending law nullified, or inoperative, within its borders.

The Senate debated the tariff question (and the underlying states' rights issue). Senator Daniel Webster of Massachusetts opposed nullification and South Carolina Senator Robert Hayne aired Calhoun's views.

In 1832 the issue of states' rights was put to a test when Congress raised tariffs again. South Carolinians declared the tariffs of 1828 and 1832 "null, void, and no law." Then they threatened to secede, or withdraw from the Union, if customs officials tried to collect duties.

In response, an outraged Jackson urged Congress to pass the Force Bill to allow the federal government to use the military if state authorities resisted paying proper duties. A bloody confrontation seemed likely until Henry Clay forged a compromise in 1833. Clay proposed a tariff bill that would gradually lower duties over a ten-year period. The compromise also included passage of the Force Bill. The tension between states' rights and federal authority subsided—temporarily.

JACKSON'S BANK WAR

Although Jackson defended federal power in the nullification crisis, he tried to decrease federal power when it came to the Second Bank of the United States. Jackson believed that the national bank was an agent of the wealthy, and that its members cared nothing for the common people.

In 1832 Jackson won reelection despite the efforts of his critics to make a campaign issue out of Jackson's opposition to the bank. After his reelection, he tried to kill the bank by withdrawing all government deposits from the bank's branches and placing them in certain state banks called "pet banks" because of their loyalty to the Democratic Party. As a result, the Bank of the United States became just another bank.

Jackson won the bank war, but his tactics and policies angered many people. Many accused him of acting more like a king than a president. In 1832, his opponents formed a new political party, which they later called the Whig Party.

1. What do you think might be the consequences of Calhoun's nullification theory for federal (national)-state relations?
2. What were some of Jackson's reasons for opposing the Second Bank of the United States?

“KING ANDREW THE FIRST”

Political Cartoon Analysis

Andrew Jackson once justified his tendency to place personal prerogative above constitutional law or national policy by stating that “One man with courage makes a majority.” His critics replied with accusations of tyranny. The New York American condemned Jackson as a “maniac,” who would “trample the rights of our people under his feet.” The Whig convention of 1834 declared, “Your president has become your MONARCH.” Both of those sentiments are reflected in this political cartoon that portrays Jackson as a king.

- Ancient portraits of kings often depicted them grinding their conquered enemies beneath their heel. Beneath Jackson’s feet are the torn pages of the Constitution.
- In one hand, Jackson is holding a scepter, a symbol of kingly power, while in the other, he is holding the veto, a symbol of presidential power.



1. What does this cartoon suggest about Jackson’s attitude toward the Constitution?
2. How does this cartoon particularly comment on Jackson’s use of presidential power?