SOWING THE SEEDS OF DISUNION: SOUTH CAROLINA’S PARTISAN NEWSPAPERS AND THE NULLIFICATION CRISIS, 1828-1833

by

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ABSTRACT

Ultimately the first state to secede on the eve of the Civil War, South Carolina erupted in controversy following the 1828 passage of an act increasing duties on foreign imports for the protection of domestic industry. Most could agree that the tariff was unconstitutional, unequal in that it benefited the industrial North more than the agrarian South, and oppressive to plantation states that had to rely on expensive northern goods or foreign imports made more costly by the duties. Factions formed, however, based on recommended means of redress. Partisan newspapers of that era became vocal supporters of one faction or the other.

What became the Free Trade Party by the end of the Nullification Crisis began as a loosely-organized group that called for unqualified resistance to what they perceived as a gross usurpation of power by the federal government. The Union Party grew out of a segment of the population that was loyal to the government and alarmed by their opposition’s disunion rhetoric. Strong at the start due to tariff panic and bolstered by John C. Calhoun’s “South Carolina Exposition and Protest,” the Free Trade Party lost ground when the Unionists successfully turned their overzealous disunion language against them in the 1830 city and state elections. Once the Nullifiers dropped their disunion focus in favor of sound Republican doctrine combined with patriotism reminiscent of the American Revolution, they became an unstoppable force. Through their new, moderate rhetoric, the Free Trade Party was able to convince the public that they valued the Union as much as anyone, that the people’s rights and the Constitution itself were in danger, that the states had the authority to interpose in such a case, and that the rightful remedy of nullification was the peaceful medium between submission to tyranny and outright revolution.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my husband and partner Jason Smith, without whose emotional, financial, moral, and editorial support I never could have completed the task. I only hope that one day I can repay him for all that he has done without uttering a single word of complaint.

I also dedicate this work to my mentor and friend of more than a decade, Dr. Wm. David Sloan. Through good fortune, I was assigned as his research assistant and learned about journalism history. Through his guidance, I became an historian myself.

Finally, I dedicate each and every word to the wonderfully colorful men of nineteenth-century South Carolina, whose passionate beliefs and eloquent writing made researching them an absolute delight.
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1. INTRODUCTION

“I am a disunionist! I am a traitor!”

The words of Congressmen Robert Barnwell Rhett reverberated through the hall in Columbia, South Carolina, where Rhett and his fellow States’ Rights activists met on September 29, 1830. The stirring oration included the revelation that George Washington, Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, and Thomas Jefferson were all disunionists and traitors in their time, “and they broke the British Empire and redrew the map of the world with the sword.” He continued that under the current administration, the Union had no choice but to dissolve. “It requires no conspiracy to destroy—no exertion on our part to drag it to its dissolution,” he said. “It goes down with the inevitable weight of its own gravitation, into that dark abyss of anarchy and ruin, where all tyrannies have fallen.” To end his speech, Rhett asserted that if his sentiments constituted him as a disunionist and a traitor, then “I am a disunionist! I am a traitor!”

Rhett’s words during the heated Nullification Crisis in South Carolina represented the sentiments of but a few radicals in the early years of the antebellum period, men who felt that actions perceived as threatening to the southern states required drastic actions to protect their rights, much like the colonies had against the British. Initially, these sentiments sparked tension not only between the northern and southern states, but also among southerners, as a war of words exploded over issues concerning states’ rights.

Tension between the State Rights and Unionist factions characterized the South during the antebellum period, and their debates originated the ideology behind southern secession and

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1 Speech in Columbia, S.C., 29 September 1830, Charleston Mercury, 19 October 1830.
eventually, the South’s entry into the Civil War. Print culture dominated American society, creating a public dependent on the printed word for information, communication, and entertainment, via books, pamphlets, broadsides, magazines, and most importantly, newspapers.² Partisanship marked Southern newspapers of the day, making them at the very least a forum for expression of public opinion if not setters of the political agenda.³ In many cases, politicians used newspapers as their official mouthpieces, occasionally to the extent of controlling the editorial position, as in Rhett’s case with the Charleston *Mercury*. In other cases, politically-conscious editors could not help but take sides as tensions mounted.

South Carolina was anomalous in many ways. Its unique geography and demographics created an economic dependence on agriculture exceeding that of any other southern state, and its aristocratic origins created a ruling planter class intent on preserving its slave-driven way of life as well as its political and social dominance. These attributes created a radical element that advocated disunion earlier and with more vigor than any other Southern state. This element produced the Nullification Crisis and test oath controversy of the 1830s, led the Bluffton movement in favor of Texas annexation, instigated the Nashville Convention and South Carolina’s first secession crisis following the Compromise of 1850, crippled an anti-slavery northern congressman, attempted to coerce other states into secession before the 1860 election, and passed the first ordinance of secession after Lincoln had won. It easily could be argued that, had this radical element not existed, South Carolina would not have seceded, the other southern states would have remained similarly complacent, and the Civil War would have been avoided.

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It, therefore, is crucial to examine the ideological origins of South Carolina’s secession movement, and its newspapers provide an ideal vehicle for doing so.

**A Brief History of South Carolina from the Sixteenth Century to the 1820s**

To fully grasp the origins of the political ideology that emerged in antebellum South Carolina, it is necessary to understand the history of the state up to that point. That history is marked by social, political, and cultural tensions stemming from geographical separations in the population. The state of South Carolina looks like an inverted triangle, bordered by North Carolina to the north, Georgia to the southwest, and the Atlantic Ocean to the southeast. A fall line divides the state into two regions: upcountry and low country. Demographic differences between inhabitants of the two geographical regions shaped the politics of the state and in some respects, the nation.4

At the time of European settlement, 165 Native American tribes inhabited what would later become the Carolina territory. After twelve years of exploring, Spaniards created an outpost in 1526 and alternated control of the region with France until England claimed it through Heath’s Charter in 1629.5 After several failed attempts, the British successfully colonized

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Carolina in 1670. The moniker of “South Carolina” for the southwest region of the province first appeared in a 1685 grant. It did not split officially from North Carolina until 1719, when colonists seeking a more democratic Fundamental Constitution overthrew the Lords Proprietors to whom King Charles II had given the territory. During the proprietary era, the colonists struggled for existence against the Spanish, French, Native Americans, and pirates, meanwhile striving for internal development and progress. The latter continued after South Carolina became a royal province.

From the beginning, agriculture shaped South Carolina’s economy, politics, and culture. Because a large number of its first settlers were Barbadian, the region mirrored the plantation

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structure of the West Indies more closely than it resembled the other mainland colonies. Planters began cultivating a number of crops during the territory’s early decades, but rice soon emerged as the state’s dominant agricultural product. First planted in 1685, rice was an important commodity by 1696. Whereas rice plantations dominated the coastal plain, other crops flourished further inland. Indigo became a second staple crop in the 1740s.

The large plantations required tremendous amounts of slave labor, for both planting and milling. Negro slaves arrived in South Carolina with the first British settlers, and slave importation reached levels unknown to any other colony in the eighteenth century. Africans’ agricultural knowledge made them even more valuable as rice culture became the basis of the low country economy, and the use of tidewater for rice cultivation gave slaves greater power and autonomy. By 1710, negro slaves outnumbered whites. Slave rebellions became a particular concern. Increase of that fear as the British began recruiting slaves to help quiet unrest on the eve of the Revolution can be credited in part for South Carolina joining the radical movement.

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By 1750, the international sale of rice and indigo had created a wealthy planter and merchant class along the low country’s coastal plain, particularly in Charles Towne, South Carolina’s only colonial city. Charles Towne became the colony’s center of refinement and culture, serving as home to numerous artists and musicians and, after 1735, America’s third theater. The population generally was well-educated, particularly the upper class. Wealthy families often sent their sons to England for higher education, perpetuating the reflection of English court customs in South Carolina’s high society.


The aristocratic elite of Charles Towne largely influenced the politics of the state, and indeed the colonies and later the nation. South Carolina’s delegates to the Stamp Act Congress were extremely powerful; two of the three chaired principal committees. The Stamp Act and import taxes disturbed the tradition of British loyalty and caused great excitement in Charles Towne, as the city participated in a boycott of British goods and a refusal to export everything except rice. Although domestic manufacturing received a temporary stimulus from non-importation, merchants feared ruin. South Carolina ceased the boycott, but had outlasted all of the other colonies. A group of planters known as the Charleston mob also rebelled against British authority in a variety of extra-legal ways, including its own Tea Party.\(^\text{15}\)

Although still inhabited by Native American tribes, the upcountry by then had filled with migrants from Virginia and other colonies, as well as from Switzerland, Germany and Britain. The isolated back country created its own economy of rustic settlements linked by overland routes, a system of small farms and cottage industries that was quite successful.\(^\text{16}\) Although that


area became overwhelmingly more populous, the concentration of social, political, and commercial interests in Charles Towne led to a neglect of the upcountry’s interests. In particular, upcountry residents resented the low country elite for failing to distribute representation fairly, and for taxing their property at the same rate as the wealthy rice plantations.¹⁷

The first Provincial Congress met soon after the first Continental Congress, and part of its aim was to draw support of the upcountry into the revolutionary movement. After war erupted, revolutionists easily suppressed anti-revolutionists in Charles Towne. Upcountry citizens largely opposed the war, however, harboring no ill will for a king who had issued ignored demands that representatives be divided with frontier parishes. The restrictive laws the British had passed did not affect the upcountry in the way they had the city dwellers and coastal planters. Conflict between upcountry and low country became a civil war within the state that lasted as long as the Revolutionary War itself.¹⁸

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South Carolina became one of the first colonies (along with New Hampshire) to set up its own government in 1776. Representation remained skewed even after the Constitution’s revision in 1778, as the low country continued to have more representatives in the legislature than the more populous upcountry.\(^\text{19}\) This division along geographical lines evolved into political partisanship after the war, as the coastal merchants and planters adopted a Federalist stance and the mass population of the upcountry became Republicans.\(^\text{20}\) The latter party scored a major victory in moving the capital from Charleston (renamed from Charles Towne after the war) to Columbia, but the Federalists maintained power.\(^\text{21}\) Although the population overwhelmingly opposed ratification of the new nation’s Constitution, the Federalist elite voted to approve it, making South Carolina the eighth state to do so.\(^\text{22}\)

Part of the coastal elite’s desire to maintain an imbalance of power stemmed from a need to protect the institution of slavery against a backcountry populated by manufacturers and


slaveless small farmers. By 1790, negro slaves accounted for more than 75 percent of the coastal population, whereas whites comprised more than 75 percent of the population in the extreme northwestern region. In the wake of a revolution based on liberty, the low country planters and politicians were forced to develop unique arguments to justify their dependence on slavery to upcountry citizens and other states. South Carolinians aimed to distinguish their form of African servitude from the cruel human bondage others imagined. Much of this argument was based on the familial nature of plantation units, casting slaves as children and their masters as benign patriarchs. Scientific evidence of negro inferiority also contributed to the argument.  

A continued belief in aristocracy also kept the power in the hands of coastal planters. Charleston had grown as a thriving social and cultural center by the turn of the nineteenth century, rivaling the best northern cities in terms of fine arts and architecture. Its now locally-educated residents continued clinging to British notions of class and racial hierarchy. Wealth

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became more concentrated among a few elite families, and the lines between upper and working classes became increasingly blurred. The coastal gentry held themselves in high esteem, opposing the mass population’s democratic, egalitarian ideals and scoffing at what they mistakenly thought to be the crude frontier.²⁶

Citizens of the upcountry had begun to make names for themselves, however, and evidence of wealth once confined to the coast began to emerge in the backcountry. An act establishing courts in the frontier counties spurred an influx of lawyers, in addition to other cultured immigrants from the low country and Virginia. Some innovative upcountry residents became entrepreneurs, investing in such non-agricultural ventures as banks and railroads. Industry flourished in the Piedmont region, particularly Greenville and Spartanburg, where manufacturers made their fortunes while attempting to lead their agrarian state into an industrial, capitalist world. Plantation culture spread into the upcountry with the increase of cotton, however, and with it came the spread of slavery and the slave-holding mentality.²⁷

By 1808, rice had developed into a large-scale capitalistic enterprise on the coast, but inland, short-staple cotton was king. Invention of the cotton gin revolutionized economic life outside the rice region. Cotton could be cultivated in the same soil that had produced indigo.

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Soon, inland farmers gave up their self-sufficient growth of varied crops and small cottage industries, focusing their energy on the planting of cotton. Meanwhile, cotton mills flourished in the industrial Piedmont. The rise in rice and cotton planting stimulated the resumption in 1803 of the foreign slave trade, which had ceased in 1787. Only then, when the threat to slavery diminished, did the low country elite relent to more equitable representation. The Compromise of 1808 gave one senator to each district except Charleston, which had two, and distributed house representatives based on white population and wealth. Although this new system gave the upcountry a majority in the legislature, slave-holding society still had a majority of the control.  

The upcountry Republican force that previously had remained helpless to counter Federalist domination due to a widely dispersed population and lack of organization came into its own as the new upcountry majority gave Republicans power in the state. South Carolina Republicans began their national ascendancy in 1811, when the state sent Langdon Cheves, William Lowndes, and John C. Calhoun to the U.S. Congress. The trio supported the nation’s efforts in the War of 1812 in order to protect its foreign cotton trade, on which the state’s economy depended. Domestic interests of the time focused on commerce, particularly chartering

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a state bank, and internal improvements for transportation of goods from upcountry to coastal ports.\(^{29}\)

Thus the state approached the critical decade of the 1820s prosperous and unified, both within itself and with the nation at large. With this peace came decreased dependence on the federal government. As Deep South states glutted the cotton market, however, the basis of the state’s economy began to crumble. White immigration slowed to a trickle, and native South Carolinians began to leave, spreading the state’s unique political ideals throughout the South.\(^{30}\)

Those who remained failed to change with the times, clinging to their agrarian ideals and the institution of slavery, and becoming agitated by the industrialist North’s growing power as well as the establishment of an organized abolition sentiment in that region. The state’s former Federalists turned sectionalist, and a rift between South Carolina and Union began to form.

Events of the coming decades only widened the chasm. Political differences within the state began to bubble up again as politicians from the former elitist school aimed to prove themselves in moments of crisis through acts that appeared reckless to their upcountry counterparts.\(^{31}\)

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Hints of Disunion: Protective Tariffs and South Carolina’s Nullification Crisis

By the late 1820s, John C. Calhoun had become a force to be reckoned with in state and national politics and a favorite son of South Carolina. He firmly believed in limiting federal interference in state affairs while upholding the Constitution, and he used ideas rooted in late-eighteenth-century Republicanism to argue on behalf of South Carolina and the South in general during many of the antebellum conflicts. Calhoun regarded the rise of industrial capitalism as a threat to the security of the South. He was known for his forthright defense of slavery and increasingly strident warnings of secession if others imperiled the continuance of the slave-based culture and economy. Calhoun may be most famous for leading South Carolina into its first serious bid for disunion during the tariff crisis.


The crisis occurred when federal interference with the institution of slavery combined with nationalistic policies such as the second bank of the United States and renewed activity in internal improvements to inspire a sectionalist element in the South. Protectionist tariffs increased the sectional tension. Debate that began when Congress passed a protective tariff in 1824 came to a head when another tariff was passed in 1828. The brainchild of Congressman Henry Clay of Kentucky, the 1824 tariff was intended to encourage domestic manufacturing by discouraging the importation of goods from Europe, levying a 35 percent tax on products made from iron, wool, cotton, and hemp that were obtained from overseas. Because the South’s economy was largely agricultural and young northern industry produced high-priced articles, southern states relied on foreign suppliers for a majority of their material goods. Duties raised the cost of foreign imports to the point of forcing the purchase of expensive domestic merchandise. When Congress raised duties in 1828 to tax imported goods at 50 percent of their value, southerners dubbed the measure the “Tariff of Abominations.”

Hearing the cry of his fellow South Carolinians, then Vice President Calhoun attempted to find a solution that would maintain the Union while preserving the rights of the southern

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states. Although he supported the Tariff of 1824, Calhoun believed the 1828 act set a dangerous example of separate representation and the promotion of one section’s interests over the others. Claiming the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798 and ’99 as precedents, he drafted the “South Carolina Exposition and Protest,” which argued that the Federal government could exercise only powers that were specifically granted, with all others being reserved expressly to the states. He called the Tariff of 1828 unconstitutional and declared that the states had the right to nullify offending laws within their borders by calling nullification conventions.34

Whereas the tariffs had drawn a fairly uniform response from the southern states, the idea of nullification sparked fierce debate, both among the southern states and within South Carolina. Political groups known as Nullifiers or (State Rights and Free Trade men) and Unionists formed, with moderates in the middle. States Rights advocates found a second hero in Senator Robert Y. Hayne, whose famous Congressional debates with Daniel Webster of Massachusetts in 1830 helped publicize the tenets of nullification.35

The Nullifiers eventually bolstered enough support to take dominant control of the legislature, and they called a Nullification Convention after the passage of another tariff bill in


1832. The resulting Nullification Ordinance declared the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832 unconstitutional and barred the collection of customs duties within the state. Fearing that nullification would lead to secession, President Andrew Jackson issued the Nullification Proclamation, in which he chastised South Carolinians who passed the Nullification Ordinance. He also urged Congress to pass the Force Bill, authorizing the use of arms to collect customs duties. Calhoun, who had resigned as Vice President to assume a vacated seat in the Senate, urged his statesmen to put off enforcing the Nullification Ordinance while he and his colleagues negotiated a compromise. On the same day that they passed the Force Bill, Congress passed the Compromise Tariff, reducing some of the previously instituted taxes and removing others altogether. Satisfied with the reductions, the South Carolina Convention repealed the Nullification Ordinance. For what it was worth, they nullified the Force Act instead.36

Print Culture and the Press in South Carolina

During this controversy, South Carolina firmly was entrenched in print culture. Print culture signifies the dominance of printed text transmission, and it requires a certain technology, skill set, and environment, as well as particular norms and values. The advent of the printing press—along with other social, economic, political, and religious changes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—revolutionized the ways in which people communicated as well as how they obtained, disseminated, processed, stored, and preserved information. These changes created a “typographical culture,” dependent on printed matter for communication, information, and entertainment. Socially, print encouraged nationalism, mass markets, universal literacy, and improved education. Print had a democratizing effect, making information available to everyone. One implication of this democratization was the potential for manipulation of public thought and opinion through propaganda.37

The democratizing aspect of print culture may have been more intense in the United States than anywhere else in the world. Yet the South did not always enjoy the same benefits of print culture that the northern United States did. In the colonial era, literacy, book ownership, and libraries were limited to the southern elite. This trend continued to some extent as the colonial period drew to a close, when certain areas had demographics and infrastructure more suited than others for obtaining and transporting print material, and the elite tended to have better education and literacy rates. However, as the national period began, southern states were

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immersed in print culture and accustomed to printing, buying, storing, and using books and newspapers. During the antebellum period, urban southerners could obtain print material easily from bookshops as well as social and circulating libraries, while peddlers made print material available to the rural southern population.\textsuperscript{38}

An integral part of print history in America is the history of its newspapers. The first continuous newspaper began publishing in 1704 in Boston, the city that a majority of America’s first newspapers called home. Colonial newspapers generally contained information clipped from other publications, primarily those that came over on ships from England. By the time of the Revolution, printers realized the power of the press as a propaganda tool and began publishing essays in an effort to sway public opinion. From the earliest days of the American press, newspapers generally adhered to one faction or another. Colonial newspapers generally served as the mouthpiece of a particular religion, whereas newspapers in the Revolutionary era promoted either the Patriot or Loyalist viewpoint. During the early national period, newspapers took this factionalism to an extreme, creating the American Party Press. Most newspapers, down to the smallest rural sheets, represented one of the political parties and made their duty promoting their respective parties’ aims while attacking their opponents. The Penny Press, emerging in 1830s New York, aimed to provide relatively objective news to the masses, who had flocked to urban centers for industrial work. Only two Southern cities, Savannah and New Orleans, had penny papers prior to the Civil War. Throughout the antebellum period, the

remainder of the South continued subscribing to the theory that newspapers should serve as partisan organs.  

Not until after the difficult proprietary period was South Carolina able to establish a newspaper. Once the royal colony had established itself, conditions had ripened for a press. As the economic, political and cultural center of the state, Charles Towne was the natural publishing center. The state’s first printing press arrived in there in 1731, and a short-lived newspaper, the *South-Carolina Weekly Journal*, began soon after. A much more important journal commenced printing in 1732: the *South-Carolina Gazette*. It continued publishing for decades, becoming by the end of the colonial era the first American journal published by a woman, Elizabeth Timothy. A former journeyman printer in the Philadelphia shop of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Whitmarsh began the *Gazette* as part of Franklin’s colonial newspaper chain. Whitmarsh intended his *Gazette* to be free from political and religious affiliation. By the time of the Revolution, with Elizabeth Timothy’s son Peter as publisher, the newspaper had become accustomed to criticizing the government, and it was a staunch supporter of the Patriot cause during the Revolution. For its first twenty years, the *Gazette* held a monopoly in the Charles Towne newspaper market. Then in 1752, a loyalist paper that called itself the *South Carolina and American General Gazette* began publishing. The newspapers reflected the concerns of colonial life in South Carolina, including slavery and relations with Native Americans. Political strife during the

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Revolution led to the establishment of other newspapers, mainly as propaganda organs, but none, including either pre-Revolutionary *Gazette* or the Revolutionary *Royal Gazette*, survived the British occupation of Charles Towne during the war.\(^{40}\)

A British printer arriving in Charleston at the end of the war established a new newspaper, called the *South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser*, the colony’s first daily newspaper. Peter Timothy’s widow Ann returned to Charleston after the war and established *The Gazette of the State of South Carolina*. The two Gazettes competed for only six months before the former’s publisher moved upstate and sold it to his competitor. The *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* published without competition until 1803, with the establishment of A.S. Willington’s *Charleston Courier*. The *Gazette* and *Courier* were the dominant newspapers in the state throughout the early national period. Upcountry printers attempted to establish publications, but the frontier culture made for unstable conditions. Even in the state’s new capital, Columbia, various attempts at starting a newspaper lasted at most a year. Other short-lived newspapers appeared in Charleston as well, generally started by political factions who found themselves without enough funding to sustain them.\(^{41}\)


The \textit{Mercury}’s controversial nature can be attributed to its ties with Robert Barnwell Rhett, the most radical leader in antebellum Charleston. A wealthy plantation aristocrat from the tidewater town of Beaufort, Rhett studied law and entered the South Carolina legislature. He became a close friend and advocate of Calhoun, who kept Rhett somewhat in check in an effort to prevent him from casting South Carolina in a bad light. Rhett’s brother-in-law John A. Stuart purchased the \textit{Mercury} in 1832, assuming editorial control. The paper thus became not Calhoun’s organ but Rhett’s. Although the \textit{Mercury} typically supported Calhoun, it occasionally broke off on its own when Rhett felt Calhoun’s actions to be too conservative, primarily during instances of compromise with the North. Though second to the \textit{Courier} in terms of both circulation and respect among South Carolinians, the \textit{Mercury} is the South Carolina paper most frequently mentioned in other newspapers of the time, thanks to its radical tone, and therefore helped to solidify South Carolina as the “radical” state in the rest of the nation’s mind.\footnote{Baldasty, “The Charleston, South Carolina Press and National News”; John Stanford Coussons, “Thirty Years with Calhoun, Rhett, and the Charleston \textit{Mercury}: A Chapter in South Carolina Politics” (PhD diss.,...}
The *Courier* represented the *Mercury*’s polar opposite. Although it took a definite political side in times of crisis, the paper remained a traditionally commercial paper with a mixture of news, business, and cultural information. Willington remained in control of the newspaper from its founding until the Civil War. He was joined by several partners over the course of those decades, including Richard Yeadon, William King, and William Gilmore Simms. This group together decided the editorial course of the *Courier*, which remained conservative until political tensions of the 1850s forced the paper into a cooperationist stance, the most conservative course its readers would tolerate.⁴⁴

Outside of Charleston, no newspaper appeared until in South Carolina after the Revolution (the first two appearing in Columbia in 1791 and 1792), but economic and political challenges caused early papers to fold quickly. By the time Congress passed the Tariff of 1828, however, newspapers in the larger upcountry towns flourished. Among them was the *Pendleton Messenger*, founded in 1807 by Jay Miller and his sons John and Crosby Wilkes Miller in Anderson County, and edited by Dr. Frederick W. Symmes during the nullification crisis. Another was the *Greenville Republican*—which historians describe as being just as outspoken as the *Charleston Mercury*, but on the other end of the political spectrum. Founded by staunch Unionist W.C. Young in 1826, the newspaper folded in 1828. The political controversies called for a newspaper in Greenville District, however, and Young restarted his newspaper as the *Greenville Mountaineer* in 1829, under the editorship of future South Carolina Governor Benjamin F. Perry.⁴⁵
Little is known about other newspapers throughout the state during the antebellum period, although many did exist. In general, however, historians have demonstrated the importance of newspapers, particularly Southern newspapers, during the era preceding the war. Hodding Carter asserts that newspapers in the South have demonstrated “closer identification with the aspirations and turmoil and tragedy of their region than have those of any other part of the United States.”

Because the Southern press did remain largely partisan throughout the antebellum era, political issues of the day became editorial issues. Slavery and states’ rights issues largely consumed the southern newspapers’ pages. As the nineteenth century wore on, the press only grew stronger with the aid of new reporting techniques, production technology, and the telegraph, and editorial voices grew louder. The loudest voices tended to be the most radical ones, especially as secession grew nearer.

Scholars of South Carolina history have used the state’s newspapers as sources, but few have examined the newspapers themselves. Historians who have investigated the South Carolina press either have conducted broad, sweeping studies of its entire history or have focused on the colonial and revolutionary eras. Those who have studied specifically the state’s antebellum press have focused on Charleston’s newspapers, particularly the Courier and Mercury. No prior historian has explored newspapers from throughout the state during the antebellum era, let alone the nullification crisis, to determine their role in the political debates of the time. This research aims to fill that gap.

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The study consists of newspapers from throughout the state from the start of 1828, when Congress was in the throes of nullification debate, until April 1833, a month after the passage of the Compromise Tariff and Force Bill. Newspapers analyzed include the following prominent newspapers from throughout the state, encompassing both sides of the nullification argument:

- Fall line—Columbia (very center of the state): South Carolina State Gazette and Columbia Advertiser and Southern Times (which merged into the Southern Times and State Gazette); Columbia Telescope.
- Low country—Grand Strand (northeast corner of the state): Winyaw Intelligencer (Georgetown).
- Low country—Charleston (eastern edge of the southern triangle): Charleston Mercury, Charleston Courier, Southern Patriot.

The editorial columns of all available issues of each of the above newspapers were scoured for editorials and correspondence on issues related to American System policy—measures that some deemed as proof of consolidated power in the federal government, to the unequal benefit of northern states over the South—and potential means of redress. Editors are not identified, because it is impossible to know for certain who wrote the editorials in any newspaper. Editorials were not signed, some newspapers had multiple editorial writers, and editors frequently had others step in for them during illnesses or absences from town without notifying their readers until after the fact (if at all). Nonetheless, a qualitative analysis of these essays enabled the researcher to answer the questions detailed below.

In the preface to his Pulitzer Prize-winning Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, Bernard Bailyn explained that he had discovered the dominant cluster of ideas, beliefs, and attitudes that came to light by concentrating on what leaders of the Revolutionary
movement said, where their ideas had come from, and how those ideas cohered. He accomplished this through a contextual study of pamphlets, which Bailyn identified as the dominant mode of publishing written arguments in Colonial America.\textsuperscript{49} Partisan newspapers were the dominant mode of publishing written arguments in antebellum South Carolina, and a contextual study of the editorials and letters therein allows a scholar to concentrate on A) What did writers during the state’s nullification movement say? B) Where did their ideas originate? C) How did those ideas come together to push the state toward nullification, the prelude to secession?

Chapter two of this study explores the discussion in South Carolina newspapers during the tariff debates in Congress throughout the winter of 1828, as well as writers’ reaction to the tariff’s passage and means of redress they recommended for the remainder of that year. Chapter three examines the conflict that erupted following the South Carolina legislature’s publication of the “Exposition and Protest,” detailing the arguments that appeared in the state’s newspapers over the course of 1829. In chapter four, research focuses on disagreement about the propriety of nullification and the necessity of a state convention leading up to South Carolina’s city and state elections of 1830. The fifth chapter details the rise of John C. Calhoun as a leader of the nullification movement and the building strength of South Carolina’s Nullification/Free Trade Party throughout 1831. Chapter six analyzes editorials and correspondence at the height of the Nullification Crisis in South Carolina, from the passage of the Tariff of 1832 through the aftermath of the Compromise Tariff and Force Bill in the spring of 1833. The study concludes with a review of the findings and suggestions for future research.

2. THE TARIFF OF ABOMINATIONS

The Tariff of 1828, known by many in the South as the “Tariff of Abominations,” was the impetus for South Carolina’s first major squabble with the national government. Third in a series of protective tariffs (the others passed in 1816 and 1824), the bill increased duties from 35 percent to 50 percent on raw iron, wool, hemp and flax; sail duck; molasses; distilled spirits; indigo; building materials (window glass and roofing and cifering slates); and silk, woolen and cotton cloths. The purpose, according to the bill’s framers and supporters, was to protect the nation’s infant manufacturing industry by encouraging the purchase of domestic goods over foreign imports.

Editorials and essays in South Carolina newspapers argued that the bill was unconstitutional, in that the writers did not believe the Constitution granted the general government the power to enact protective duties on imports. Tariff opponents were most vehement, however, in their insistence that the bill oppressed the South while ensuring the North an unequal share in the nation’s prosperity. While these tariffs served to increase profits for northern industry, cultivation of cotton had superseded a majority of such efforts in agrarian southern states such as South Carolina, where planters felt they could make enough money from the sale of cash crops to buy everything else they needed. Southerners thus were forced to either purchase certain items from northern manufacturers at a much higher cost than they had been paying for European imports, or continue purchasing from overseas at a rate inflated by the tariffs. Furthermore, southern editors and correspondents feared that retaliation from abroad

50 Act of May 19, 1828, ch. 55, 4 Stat. 270.
would reduce the foreign market for raw materials produced by southern planters, especially cotton. Ultimately, some opponents predicted, southern planters would be forced to abandon the way of life they held sacred to begin factories in order to share in the nation’s wealth. Short-staple cotton growers from the middle of the state suffered from the tariffs more than the coastal rice and Sea Island cotton planters. By 1828, however, the low country aristocrats began to see the tariff issue combined with slavery agitation as a pattern of majority tyranny, and the Charleston elite joined the movement against federal protectionism.  

**Tariff Debate in Congress**

When the 20th Congress met for its first session in December 1827, a Committee on Manufactures was appointed to deliberate on the tariff matter. On 31 January 1828, the committee presented its report and a draft of the tariff bill, which South Carolina statesman John C. Calhoun later admitted was calculated to ruin both the chances of the tariff’s passage and the reelection bid of John Adams. The bill contained high duties on raw materials for which New Englanders wanted low duties. Therefore, committee members against the tariff erroneously expected that New England Congressmen (primarily Adams men) would balk and prevent its passage. The goals were for the tariff issue to die and the Adams administration to be blamed for its defeat, bolstering Andrew Jackson’s bid for the presidency.  

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The tariff bill provoked three months of heated debate, but the House of Representatives did pass it on April 22. A brief Senate debate resulted in passage of the House’s tariff with amendments on May 14, and the House approved all amendments by the Senate on May 15.\(^{53}\)

Although opposition to the tariff was nearly universal among South Carolina newspapers, some writers took their resistance much further than others. Whereas most editors and correspondents urged moderate methods with the aim of urging Congress to repeal the act, writers in the *Charleston Mercury* believed the Tariff of Abominations to be so onerous that the state should go to any lengths necessary to preserve her rights. Editorialis and letters published in other newspapers accused the *Mercury* of using radical language intended to make a greater crisis of the tariff than it really was and, worse still, to incite the public to disunion.

In an article entitled “Signs of the Times,” the *Mercury’s* editor proclaimed, “Questions touching the peculiar institutions of the Southern States have been broached, and doctrines have been advanced dangerous to their rights and interests.” He suspected that some northern politicians intended to form a party based on aversion to southern principles, with protective tariffs chief among the issues on the northern platform. The *Mercury’s* editorials voiced opposition to the measure and lamented that its proponents were “too well organised [sic] to give the friends of Commerce and Agriculture any fair chance whatever.” Although they did not detail the reasons for their hostility to the bill, *Mercury* editors and correspondents used adjectives such as “onerous” and “exceptionable” to describe the bill, and vaguely predicted “ruinous consequences” should it pass. Editorialis and letters expressed fear of compromise with

\(^{53}\) 4 Cong. Deb. 2472, 786, 2714 (1828).
the tariff’s “selfish” supporters, but encouraged cooperation of southern members with opponents of the bill from eastern states to effect its defeat.\textsuperscript{54}

The theme of the \textit{Southern Patriot}’s commentary on the tariff question was the widening division among those promoting their own interests. Editorials accused Congressmen of being selfish in their aspirations both in the increasing or decreasing of duties and the distribution of funds obtained through them for internal improvements, all for sectional advantage. Supporters of an increase in woolen duties, for example, fought against similar increases in hemp and molasses. In promoting their respective interests, the two sides produced confusion among their fellow Congressmen and the public through misrepresentation of facts and diatribes that contained no facts at all but simply rhetorical flourishes. Nonetheless, the \textit{Patriot}’s editor surmised that squabbling between East and West to protect their respective interests offered the only chance for the South to avoid “being squeezed to annihilation” by ever-increasing duties. He also credited South Carolina congressmen, who had kept their wits about them and ignored claims that increased duties on indigo and cotton would be a boon to the South. Resisting such amendments proved that the “Plantation States” were not stooping to the level of others by pushing for protection of their own chief exports; instead they continued to oppose the tariff on principle.\textsuperscript{55}

Similarly, editorials in the \textit{Camden Journal} called for all parties to “forget their local prejudices and policies; to make those mutual concessions which are requisite to the general prosperity; and in some instances, to sacrifice their individual advantages to the interest of the community.” The editor considered it unfortunate the tariff matter generated so much

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disagreement that folks failed to listen to the call of reason. Ultimately, the Journal’s editor believed the tariff should be defeated because Congress operated outside of its constitutional bounds. The Constitution, he proclaimed, was a compact among the states as separate and independent sovereignties, and by passing a law for duties to be collected from the states without their consent, Congress was violating that compact.56

A correspondent, published in the Charleston Courier under the name of “Hamilton,” disagreed. Throughout the month of January, Hamilton wrote lengthy essays for the Courier dealing primarily with the constitutionality of the tariff and Congress’s power to enact it. Hamilton’s detailed analysis of the Constitution provided evidence that Congress was well within its rights as detailed in the national charter to legislate over commerce, agriculture, and manufacturing. The states were not the ultimate power; they had relinquished the power to regulate trade when they ratified the Constitution. Had the states retained individual power, confusion and disorder would prevail, whereas the general government legislated with the goal of uniformity and harmony. Hamilton further averred that protection of domestic manufacturing was necessary to prevent dependence on foreign entities, and that the restrictive system would benefit cotton growers. The writer chastised the more militant tariff opponents for assuming “the attitude of menace and defiance; to throw down the gauntlet, and rush into mortal strife with the Government of the Union.”57

Once the bill passed the House, correspondence appeared in the Mercury explaining the vote. One letter declared that anti-tariff men had voted for its passage because they believed seven weeks was enough time for discussion, and because they knew they could not say or do

anything to prevent its passage. What’s more, they anticipated that further discussion could only result in amendments which would make the bill more harmful to the South. Correspondence in the *Southern Patriot* similarly argued that southern congressmen had done “all that men could do in their situation” to oppose the measure, to no avail. The letter echoed the *Patriot* editor’s sentiments that the question had devolved into a squabble among promoters of various interests and predicted that now that the “agony” of the tariff subject had ended, the House could return to reason and legislate for the benefit of the entire nation. The correspondent had little hope that the Senate would act any differently, predicting that the bill would pass after “many efforts to make it exclusively beneficial to the manufacture of Woollen [sic] goods.”

South Carolina Senator Robert Y. Hayne became the *Mercury*’s hero as the Senate debate drew to a close. He declared that in the entire tariff debate, “the interests of the South have been sacrificed, shamefully sacrificed! Her feelings have been disregarded—her wishes slighted—her honest pride insulted!” He urged his fellow southerners not to “sit coolly and see the parties who are to benefit by this system compromise with each other, while we are to be the losers under all circumstances.” He later presented a motion to postpone the bill indefinitely, supported by what the *Mercury* called a “long and able speech, in which he entered a solemn protest against it as unjust, oppressive, and unconstitutional.” The *Mercury* published a summary of the speech in which Hayne particularly objected to duties on indigo, one of his state’s cash crops, and questioned whether “the American system means a system for the exclusive benefit of particular employments and particular states…—whether the manufacturers were the only class in the country who are to enjoy the protection of this system.”

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58 *Charleston Mercury*, 22 April 1828, p. 2; “To the Editor,” *Southern Patriot*, 29 April 1828, p. 2.  
Reaction to the Tariff’s Passage

Outcry reached fever pitch after the House’s final passage of the Tariff bill. Not only did many of the newspapers publish editorials and essays lamenting what they considered to be a terrible transgression against the agricultural states, but they also proposed means of recourse that ranged from the establishment of industry within the state to nullification of the offending law.

The *Mercury* responded to the bill’s passage with an editorial proclaiming that the people of the state felt they had been “reduced to a condition almost tantamount to colonial vassalage,” and that the tariff act was but a forerunner of other acts that would further demonstrate the general government’s propensity to assume power beyond what the Constitution allowed. Additional *Mercury* editorial comment declared that citizens throughout the South “suffer equally under the cruelty of the ‘oppressors,’” and called upon the southern states to assemble in a convention for the purpose of devising and recommending “such measures, consistent with the Constitution, as may be best calculated to protect them against the operation of the Act.” Although the *Mercury*’s editor asserted that the South must resist the tariff, he questioned “whether by any possible course of conduct, we can avert the misfortunes which threaten us, without incurring the hazard of others, still more dreadful and appalling.”

The *Camden Journal* editor’s primary complaint was that the tariff would produce retaliation by the nations whose produce would be taxed through the “mad and mischievous” bill. He predicted the “violent measure will give the death blow to reciprocity as well in the Western as in the Eastern world.” Viable competition from Egyptian and Brazilian exporters

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intensified the editor’s fear that South Carolina would lose Great Britain as a purchaser for its cotton.\textsuperscript{61}

Complaints about decreasing foreign cotton exports appeared frequently in the \textit{Southern Patriot} as well. Its editor complained that the tariff “invades the very sources of our prosperity by striking at our \textit{means of production}.” Chief among the editor’s concerns over exports was Great Britain’s reduction of duties on cottons from British possessions, namely the British East Indies, and other cotton imports. The \textit{Patriot}’s editor considered the measure retaliation to “our absurd and suicidal attempt to legislate away the commerce of the country” and lamented that South Carolina planters would not be able to compete with East India cotton growers in British markets under the disadvantage of higher duties. The \textit{Patriot} argued that domestic manufacturing could not progress quickly enough to catch up with previous foreign demand. To make matters worse, the pledges by some South Carolinians not to purchase northern fabrics caused some northern manufacturers to retaliate by pledging not to use raw cotton from Charleston. The \textit{Patriot}’s editor explained, “Charleston being the Metropolis is to be placed under commercial proscription, as a punishment for the \textit{sins of the State at large}.”\textsuperscript{62}

Although the editor of the \textit{Columbia State Gazette and Commercial Advertiser} had little to say on the matter, pledging himself to be neutral, he did publish a letter signed “A True Whig” that questioned the arguments of the anti-tariffites, particularly regarding the constitutionality of the measure. The writer quoted passages from the Constitution as evidence that Congress had

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the power to lay duties for the general welfare of the United States, arguing that protection of domestic manufactures would benefit everyone by ultimately depressing the price of goods.\textsuperscript{63}

The \textit{Courier} published several letters signed “A Native” in the months following the tariff’s passage, which also served to defend the tariff proponents against the arguments of others in the state. Native argued that the tariff was not as unfair and oppressive as others would encourage the public to believe, but was in fact good for the economy, North and South. Rather than raising the cost of goods, the tariff would equalize and eventually reduce them. As consumption shifted to domestic manufacturers, they would flourish and lower their prices. Native called arguments that cotton planters would be forced to give up their vocation absurd. Not only did the writer dispute that British markets for cotton would close, he predicted that new domestic markets would open to supplement them. The situation only had become a crisis because a faction of “enemies to the Union” had made it one by attempting to throw the public into confusion. The tariff could create a nation “competent to the supply of each other’s wants—confident in each other’s candour and justice, and harmonizing in fair and honorable commerce.”

Instead, certain South Carolinians used the tariff as an excuse to destroy the union through its rhetoric and leave commerce and manufactures prostrated. “Often I have been astonished at the facility with which the public are made to swallow ‘non sequiturs’ by those who can pass them off with an air of conviction,” Native wrote, “but never was there a more gross one attempted than this.”\textsuperscript{64}


Other correspondents in the *Courier* supported Native’s points. A rice planter under the pseudonym “A Country Rustic” argued that Congress had spent so much time discussing and deliberating on the tariff that it could not be accused of passing the bill with sinister motives. The writer believed that the bill was for the general welfare and not to oppress the South, and that all would benefit. Another correspondent accused the anti-tariff group of misleading the public through its rhetoric, proclaiming, “NEVER has the public mind been so completely deceived by barefaced assertion and miserable sophistry, as in the case of the Tariff.” Cotton planters would not be robbed of their produce to pay the tariff, and the writer told the public to distrust men who tried to convince them otherwise. The same themes emerged in a series of letters signed “Union,” which questioned the reasoning of the tariff opponents and pointed out the “fundamental errors” of their arguments. Union admitted that if South Carolina were oppressed to the point of ruin by unequal legislation, it would be prudent to resist. However, “notwithstanding all the noisy and heated declamation, the artful descriptions, and the bitter and heartburning complaints which are daily and even hourly assailing our ears,” that was not the case with the tariff. The *Courier*’s editor quoted from a personal letter predicting that the public would discover that the arguments were false and would settle down: “The noise now making about the Tariff, I think will all end in smoke.”

**Anti-Tariff Meetings and Expressions of Resistance**

Settling down was the last thing on the minds of a group of citizens from the Colleton District, who gathered at Walterborough Court House in June to contemplate modes of

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resistance. Considered by many to be a formal act of rebellion, the meeting represented a marked turn toward disunion.

The group passed a resolution accepting an address Robert Barnwell Smith submitted, in which he recommended outright revolution:

If you are doubtful of yourselves—if you are not prepared to follow up your principles wherever they may lead, to their very last consequence—if you love life better than honor—prefer ease to perilous liberty and glory; awake not! stir not!—Impotent resistance will add vengeance to your ruin. Live in smiling peace with your insatiable Oppressors, and die with the noble consolation, that your submissive patience will survive triumphant your beggary and despair.

Accompanying editorial comment in the *Mercury* called the address “fervid, eloquent, and impressive,” and declared that it “embodies the political creed, the popular feeling, and probably the determined policy of South Carolina.”

Anti-tariff meetings elsewhere echoed the sentiments of those voiced in Colleton. Proceedings in St. John’s Parish, which the *Mercury* likened to the earlier meeting in neighboring Walterborough, resolved that “treason consists not in resisting usurpation, but in submissively yielding to its dictates.” At St. John’s and many other South Carolina meetings, resolutions generally voiced opposition to the tariff, supported active resistance, and called on the state government for aid in procuring its repeal. In the state capital of Columbia, “a very large and respectable meeting of citizens” met to sign a petition for the state legislature, “upon which alone the hopes of the people rest.” Later on the same night, in the same city, a less civilized group burned the tariff act along with effigies of Henry Clay and other congressmen responsible for its passage. In Edgefield, Congressman George McDuffie spoke for an hour and a half explaining the facts with “irresistible argument and impassioned eloquence,” and “portrayed the odious unjust, unequal and monopolizing spirit of the whole prohibitory system,

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66 *Charleston Mercury*, 18 June 1828, p. 2.
and of the degradation and ruin to which the south would be reduced by submission to the present law.” The *Mercury* editor proclaimed that by summer’s end the meetings, which had taken place in almost every section of the State, had “with a dignity and firmness becoming them as free-men,…asserted their rights, and taken counsel of each other as to the best and most efficient means of procuring a reparation of their wrongs.”

Letters poured into the *Mercury’s* office supporting the anti-tariff resolutions. The correspondence vehemently opposed the tariff (which more often than not, their writers described as “oppressive”) and equating the northern manufacturers with pirates and plunderers. One writer declared it painful that Carolinians must consider disunion, but proclaimed southern citizens “disgraced if we submit, and we cannot effectually resist but by assuming an attitude of virtual secession, by resuming our full sovereignty.” A writer under the name of “Sidney” concurred that submission had become a vice and resistance a virtue and penned several letters exploring the sovereignty of the states. He declared that the tariff’s supporters had disregarded the ties of the South to the rest of the country and inquired “of what value is our union with such men?” A writer who called himself “Leonidas” penned a series in which he also defended southerners in the disunion movement on the principle that the tariff’s proponents already had destroyed the Union and torn the Constitution to pieces. Letters under the pseudonym “Colleton” admonished those who supported moderate recourse in a case in which “we are forgotten, neglected, and despised, as if we did not belong to the American family.” Colleton

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asserted that disunion was preferable to submission. Another writer similarly dismissed suggestions of moderate recourse, insisting that the evil “lies too deep to be probed and eradicated by a remedy of this sort,” and that the “suffering states” must voice their veto to protect themselves and future generations from violations of their rights.  

Similar letters and editorials appeared in the *Patriot*. The editor insisted that some sort of action was necessary to force Congress to see the error of its ways. He argued that 13 states who act together to injure 11 shall not go unanswered; those in the minority should have the power to rectify the wrong and redress injury to them by the “wicked or ignorant majority.” A letter-writer called X pointed out that the South faced a great dilemma: non-consumption of northern goods forced consumers to pay prices rendered enormous by the tariff on foreign products, while using domestic fabrics entailed enormous expense and “would be laying still deeper the foundation of that system which we should strenuously oppose, on the double ground of its impolicy and unconstitutionality.” They had no choice but to protest so that Congress heard their grievances. X argued that it was for the protection of the Constitution and union that they fought, because they were protesting against a measure that produced a conflict of rival interests.  

Similar ideas were expressed via toasts delivered at various celebrations throughout the summer, which were published in the state’s newspapers. Editorial comment accompanying the report of one dinner proclaimed that the proceedings, when taken together, proved that on the subject of the tariff, “there is but one common feeling throughout the state.” Common themes

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68 *Charleston Mercury*, 3 July 1828, p. 2; 4 July 1828, p. 2; 8 July 1828, p. 2; 9 July 1828, p. 2; 12 July 1828, p. 2; 13 July 1828, p. 2; 16 July 1828, p. 2; 17 July 1828, p. 2; 18 July 1828, p. 2; 19 July 1828, p. 2; 31 July 1828, p. 2; 1 August 1828, p. 2. See also letters from A South Carolinian, *Charleston Mercury*, 12 August 1828, p. 2; 13 August 1828, p. 2; 14 August 1828, p. 2; 15 August 1828, p. 2; 18 August 1828, p. 2; 19 August 1828, p. 2; 6 September 1828, p. 2; 9 September 1828, p. 2.

included free trade, equality of rights, the spirit of revolution, the sovereignty of South Carolina, and fervent opposition to tyranny in general.\textsuperscript{70}

Fourth of July celebrations provided ample opportunity for celebrations and toasting, focusing on the heroes of 1776. One toaster at a celebration in Charleston compared 4 July 1776, when “the sun of our glory arose in brilliancy and splendor,” to 1828, when “clouds, and darkness, and shadows rested upon it.” The Spirit of ’76 became a catch-phrase, particularly among those who drew the parallel of taxation without representation and hoped that its results “in the present instance” would be “brilliant as in the first.” Another toast to the Spirit of ’76 called for it to arise “like the Phoenix, with renewed splendor, from the political conflagration which threatens to assal us.”\textsuperscript{71}

\textit{Reaction to the Fervor}

As the rhetoric of resistance flooded meeting halls and some newspapers’ pages, other speakers and newspapers called for moderation. The excitement had raised alarm, even among many who disagreed with the tariff. Despite the perceived oppression and inequality of the measure, many writers believed the tariff bill did not represent a severe enough circumstance to warrant a militant resistance against the government.

At a celebration marking a Revolutionary War battle reported in the \textit{Courier}, toasters indicated that a better compliment to the heroes would be to patriotically protect the Union they fought for rather than to imitate their resistance. Col. C. J. Steedman toasted specifically to state rights, noting that if infringed, “moderate and judicious remonstrance would insure their

security.” Governor John Taylor, speaking in response to a toast in his honor at a separate
celebration in Columbia, admitted that the tariff was unjust “in taking out of the pockets of one
class of citizens to enrich another” and declared it South Carolina’s duty to push for repeal. Yet
he urged a moderate course, arguing that for the state to act rashly on her own would be folly and
potentially could lead to civil strife. He believed that when Congress realized the tariff’s effect
on foreign relations, it would retrace its steps.\footnote{72}

A writer for the \textit{Camden Journal} concurred, noting that the rhetoricians spewing the
language of disunion did so with complete disregard for its consequences. Although the writer
thought the tariff was unconstitutional and that it would bring poverty to the South, he argued
that South Carolina should not avoid a minor evil by resorting to a greater one. He believed
writers “arrayed in the most inflammatory costume” had intruded their sentiments upon the
public with the sole purpose of arousing their passions. “With the true spirit of freemen,” he
proclaimed, “let us rather submit to a little inconvenience than be the first to secede from a union
‘cemented by the blood of our forefathers.’” The \textit{Journal}’s editor similarly lamented that the
“fearful subject” of disunion had become so commonplace. A group of rabble-rousers had
“hurried into inconsiderate language” and “told the tale of their grievances in terms too fervid
and inflammatory.” He felt that the people of South Carolina would not be talked into secession
at the moment, but feared that they could be if the American System should continue.\footnote{73}

The \textit{Courier} came out strongly against the disunionists via numerous letters and
editorials. The outspoken correspondent “A Native,” in letters under the heading
“Constitutionality of the Tariff,” pointed out that much of the argument regarding the bill’s

adherence to the national charter had to do with the sovereignty guaranteed the respective states. Native cited resolutions by the anti-tariffites and declared that no one could read it “without seeing in it, from beginning to end, a preparation for revolution.” Like the writers in the Journal, Native accused anti-tariffites of purposely attempting to turn the public against the general government and urged South Carolinians to pray for the country’s well-being.74

Other correspondents to the Courier agreed that a certain faction had used forceful language regarding the tariff to spread fear and excite the public into feelings of disunion. “Carolinian” accused “political demagogues and over-zealous partizans [sic]” of misleading the people through a picture of despair that left no mode of redress but resistance. The writer proclaimed that “reason and experience have become lost in the violent declamation of overheated imaginations.” A writer known as “Lowndes” used similar language, arguing that reasonable men could see that regulation of trade enacted by the proper authority is a principle of a republican government, unrightfully opposed under the pretext of state sovereignty. Surely, he argued, the anti-tariffites realized the truth and were simply endeavoring “to foment incurable animosities amongst the different sections of our country” and the general government.75

In a series of letters, a correspondent under the pseudonym “One of the People” specifically blamed over-zealous orations at the anti-tariff meetings, disseminated through the Mercury and other newspapers, for spinning the situation out of control. The writer only hoped that the people would avert the impending danger of disunion through good sense. “Lalius” also blamed the anti-tariff meetings for a “violent current of public feeling” that had “drowned the voice of reason.” The writer noted that five months after the tariff’s passage, planters were

getting more for their produce and paying less for manufactured goods, indicating that there was no grounds for the public furor.\textsuperscript{76}

Some \textit{Courier} writers agreed with the principles of secession, but they did not think the time had come to exercise it. “A Citizen of the United States” wrote that governments are intended to uphold the rights and happiness of their constituents, and that it is the duty of the people to alter or abolish governments that fail to accomplish that end. However, such was not the case in the United States. The writer called the general government the best man had ever known and avowed that to destroy it would be “the deed of a fool, a madman, or a fiend.” “Moderation” similarly insisted that the tariff was insufficient cause for dissolving the Union. He declared no one had proven that the tariff law was injurious to the South, but even if it was, “as ours is a government of compromise, the good sense of the nation will correct the evil much sooner than by a violent course of proceeding on our part.”\textsuperscript{77}

The \textit{Courier}’s editor praised the people of Charleston for refusing to be excited to the same sentiments as their brethren in Colleton and other towns, proclaiming, “The sober and reflecting portion of THE PEOPLE appear, indeed, to have already ‘\textit{calculated the value of this Union},’ and to have arrived at a conclusion exactly the reverse of that which was so much desired, and so confidently anticipated by the ‘great apostle of disunion.’” He encouraged the people to look with horror and indignation upon the words of those who sought to alienate the state from the Union. The tariff would not bring the annihilation that anti-tariffites predicted, but separation from the nation would.\textsuperscript{78}


\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Charleston Courier}, 23 June 1828, p. 2, 25 June 1828, p. 2; emphasis in original.
**Homespun as a Moderate Alternative**

Rather than inciting revolution and disunion, several writers encouraged developing a greater manufacturing base in South Carolina to reduce the reliance on imports. Defending against accusations that the *Camden Journal*’s response to the tariff had been lukewarm, its editor argued that he, unlike others, had exercised common sense and a calm and dispassionate mind. He claimed that the folks of Kershaw District intended to act and not merely to talk, via establishment of manufactures that would push the state to the utmost point of success. The editor used his July 4th editorial to detail the history of South Carolina’s planter culture, arguing that planters had created a vicious cycle of growing cotton to buy negroes and buying negroes to grow cotton, “thus commencing a new and equally ruinous slave trade, as well as simultaneously abandoning the cultivation of provisions.” This habit had created a necessity to import every need and luxury from either old or New England. He declared homespun to be the order of the day to end the cycle of dependence on others, and later announced that the “disposition to foster domestic manufacture of the State is advancing rapidly” in the upper districts of York and Chester. A letter from a reader concurred that people needed to stop complaining about past evils, and instead turn their energies toward providing for the future and becoming independent. The writer called for the people of Camden to meet and open books for stock in a manufacturing company. The people of Richland District met with a similar aim. The *State Gazette* reported the formation of a committee to determine what branches of industry could be carried on in the state “without an investiture of great capital, and to devise every means in our power to free us from this system of plunder.”

Like the Journal’s editor, the Courier’s editor also blamed the cotton planters for the dependence on imports and argued that they “ought to turn our attention to something more promising and productive.” The correspondent “A Carolinian” similarly proclaimed the tariff to be a blessing in that it caused the planters to see the “true cause of depression under which agriculture languishes” —their own extravagance. If the planters resolved to be independent by producing for themselves every necessary article for consumption, domestic economy would triumph over faction. “A Cotton Purchaser” specifically encouraged South Carolina to begin manufacturing goods required for the reaping and sowing of cotton and rice. Other writers declared South Carolina the perfect place to manufacture cotton cloth. One proclaimed it silly to transport raw cotton thousands of miles and back again for manufacturing, when the high lands of the South Carolina upcountry contained an abundance of water power that could be used to produce cotton fabrics at a much lower price than those made in New England. Another asked why South Carolina let foreign countries profit by turning her raw material to clothes but complained about the North becoming rich by doing the same. The writer noted that the state had ample raw material at its disposal and should avail itself of the bounty that comes from manufacturing with it.80

Months later, under a new editor, the Journal maintained its stance that homespun was the best recourse “to convince the monopolists of their impolicy.” The new editor, like the disunionists, invoked the spirit of the eighteenth century revolutionaries, but with the aim of stirring patriotism in his readers. Like the patriots of old, he insisted the people of South Carolina should band together to redress the wrongs of exclusive legislation and general taxation

for particular benefit. Although a push toward disunion never could be unanimous, he believed everyone could agree on homespun. If everyone joined hands “clad in the uniform of principle, the costume of resistance to tyranny,” the tariff would die a natural death.81

Not everyone could agree on homespun, however. The Southern Patriot and Mercury both published arguments against it. The Patriot’s editor insisted that southern states could not compete with northern states, which in addition to a quarter-century head start establishing industry, had infrastructure suitable for shipping as well as abundant coal mines needed for steam manufacturing. He declared that South Carolinians should not be distracted from their natural profession of farming. The Mercury agreed with the Journal’s editor that unanimity of sentiment on the proper course to be pursued was necessary for the state to successfully combat its foes, but argued that homespun was not the answer. He considered the establishment of manufacturing to be submissive to the American System, and that like the tariff, it would benefit only a few individuals without effecting general relief. He insisted that only through repeal of the tariff would the South be saved, and the efforts of all the state’s writers should go toward that aim.82

The Tariff and the Presidential Election

By mid-August, much of the newspapers’ attention had turned to the presidential election, which pitted the incumbent John Quincy Adams against War of 1812 hero Andrew Jackson for the second time. The election had been discussed in the press at some length throughout the year, and partisans tied the tariff issue into the campaign.

Writers for the *Charleston Courier* blamed the Jacksonians for the tariff. In Washington correspondence discussing its passage by the House, the correspondent noted “the friends of the Administration have been thwarted” and insisted that the bill had “no reference to any manufacture whatever, but the manufacture of a President.” Other writers attributed the tariff to a Congress dominated by Jackson republicans and cited speeches by Jackson partisans who supported the tariff. Against arguments by Jacksonians claiming their hero was not a tariff man, *Courier* correspondents pointed out that Jackson had voted for the tariff of 1824 and had written letters recently supporting the 1828 bill. Other writers noted the inconsistency of vehement anti-tariff men supporting Jackson while resisting a measure he always advocated and surmised that they pinned the tariff on the Adams administration to resolve their dilemma. Another essayist posited that the disunion men seeking election or reelection to state positions found themselves struggling due to their radical views and tied themselves to Jackson because of his avowed patriotism and his popularity in the state.83

The *Camden Journal* was among the newspapers who displayed the inconsistency that *Courier* writers alleged by supporting Jackson while vehemently opposing the tariff. As a new editor took control of the *Journal*, he noted that the most important issues of the day were the election, the tariff, and internal improvements, all of which he proclaimed to be intertwined. He established his stance as pro-Jackson, anti-tariff, and altogether against too much power in the hands of the federal government. Nine months earlier, the prior editor copied an item from the *Alabama Journal* directed at Kentucky Senator Henry Clay and his support of the American

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System and commented that Adams and Clay keeping possession of the presidency would allow them to continue “play[ing] their pranks.”

A writer for the *Mercury* declared that it was supporters of the Administration who were inconsistent in that they professed to want the tariff repealed but stumped for politicians (especially Clay) who supported the Tariff. A vote for Jackson, on the other hand, was a vote against the tariff.

After the *Mercury* established itself as both the leading Jackson organ in South Carolina and the author of the most radical anti-tariff rhetoric, the Washington *National Intelligencer* blamed the Jackson party for disunion sentiments and predicted that “Gen. Jackson’s election to the Presidency would be tantamount to the destruction of the confederacy.” The *Mercury* countered by professing that the editors of the *Intelligencer* “can be governed by no other motive than increasing the excitement which they profess to deplore…to fan the flame of discord, and to goad the people of the South to the very excitement which they pretend to regard with horror.”

A letter to the Mercury’s editor voiced shock that the *Intelligencer*, *National Journal*, “and other partizans [sic] of the Administration” had taken the resolutions passed in South Carolina meetings against the tariff as political movements by the Jackson party with the true aim not of repealing the Tariff, but of dividing the Union. The writer called the accusations slanderous toward Jackson, whose love of country would prevent him from promoting disunion, as well as toward the “high-minded and patriotic citizens of South Carolina.” The Mercury’s editor assumed that the editors of the *Intelligencer* perceived no difference between “a scheme of

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forcible resistance to the Tariff,” and a mere enquiry into what course Carolina ought to pursue on that subject.  

As Adams newspapers continued to label supporters of Jackson as the “disunion party,” the Mercury worked feverishly to shake the title. An editorial in mid-September avowed that “the only efforts at disunion are those which are made by the enemies of Jackson to divide his friends.” The paper also scorned members of Adams’s Administration ticket in the state, decrying that those who had “abandoned South Carolina to the oppressions of the government, and openly advocate the acts by which her commerce, her agriculture, and even her political rights are destroyed, now call upon the people to support the Union.” But the word Union, as used in the Administration presses, meant nothing more nor less than Clay and Adams, the Mercury declared. A Mercury writer on the eve of the election insisted that Jacksonians demonstrated “our desire to destroy that Typhoon of discord that would array the children of the Republic against each other, and we give a new and a noble pledge of our fidelity to the UNION.”

A Courier writer sided with the Mercury in its insistence that support for Jackson could not be equated with disunion. Instead, the writer professed Jackson to be the greatest stumbling block in the way of the disunion faction. The letter boldly pinned the disunion sentiment on two of South Carolina’s most respected statesmen, John C. Calhoun and George McDuffie, proclaiming that they would like nothing better than to separate the state from the nation and that

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the tariff was the only measure through which they could hope to excite the public toward that aim.⁸⁸

As Congress debated and passed the Tariff of 1828—intended to enhance protection of domestic industry through the increase of duties on exports established in 1816 and 1824—newspapers throughout South Carolina lashed out at the measure. Editors and correspondents argued that the act was unconstitutional, unequal in its benefits, and oppressive to the South. Citizens opposed to the tariff met in their respective districts statewide throughout the summer of 1828, passing resolutions that called for unqualified resistance to what they perceived as a gross usurpation of power by the federal government. Their toasts, speeches, and newspaper writings invoked the Spirit of ’76, comparing the plight of 1828 South Carolina to that of the patriots who risked their lives to resist tyranny during the Revolutionary War.

As cries of disunion rang out across the state, some editors and correspondents became alarmed and issued arguments countering those of the most militant tariff opponents. These writers avowed that the Constitution afforded Congress the right to regulate foreign trade for the general welfare of the nation, and they insisted that South Carolina would not be injured as much as the radical anti-tariff camp would have the people believe. Moderate writers proclaimed that instead of crying tyranny, South Carolinians should become more industrious to reduce the necessity of purchasing northern or foreign goods and to ensure an equal share of the tariff’s protection. Furthermore, these writers declared that protecting the Union for which the patriots fought would be a better way to honor the memory of the Revolutionary War than to mimic their resistance.

Andrew Jackson found support on both sides of the issue, but his most outspoken advocates were those who believed the tariff should be resisted at all costs. Thus, newspapers that favored the reelection of John Quincy Adams began to equate Jackson with the disunion cause. Moderates in South Carolina presented John C. Calhoun as one of the true originators of disunion sentiment—an argument that had some merit. In December, the South Carolina legislature received a pamphlet that Calhoun authored anonymously, titled the “South Carolina Exposition and Protest.” The document spelled out the doctrine of nullification and stated that South Carolina would secede if Congress did not repeal the tariff, setting off a new firestorm of controversy in the state’s newspapers over the potential for disunion.
3. CONFLICT IN THE WAKE OF THE EXPOSITION AND PROTEST

South Carolinians who believed they had been oppressed by the Tariff of 1828 looked to their state legislature for relief. On 19 December 1828, a special House committee responded with the “South Carolina Exposition and Protest,” which John C. Calhoun secretly had drafted. South Carolina’s House of Representatives published the manifesto in pamphlet form with amendments and its own protest, circulating thousands of copies throughout the state and beyond.

As many newspapers had over the course of the prior year, Calhoun argued in the exposition that the tariff was unconstitutional because the federal compact did not expressly give Congress the right to lay protective duties. He also declared the tax unequal and oppressive in that it “rear[ed] up the industry of one section of the country on the ruins of another.” The election of “eminent citizen” Andrew Jackson provided a glimmer of hope; his ascension to the presidency represented “a great political revolution,” displacing from power “those who acquired authority by setting the will of the people at defiance.” Anticipating Jackson’s aid, the state committee recommended presenting their protest to Congress with the object of instigating a repeal of “the obnoxious and unconstitutional acts, and thereby prevent the necessity of interposing the sovereign power of this State.” Revoking the tariff not only would “restore the Constitution to its original purity,” but it also would “allay the differences which have been unhappily produced between various States, and between the States and General Government.”
On the other hand, failure to abolish the acts would deepen the animosity and force the state to act in self-defense by nullifying the tariff law.89

Congressmen Robert Y. Hayne and William Smith presented a brief version of the state’s protest to the U.S. Senate on 10 February 1829. Six of their eight points emphasized that the Constitution did not grant Congress the right to regulate foreign commerce; the other two focused on the tariff’s oppressive and unequal nature. In their speeches accompanying the protest, however, the senators stressed the suffering of their constituents. They also responded to allegations of treason made against South Carolinians who had gathered in anti-tariff meetings to consider means of seeking redress. Smith professed that the state remained devoted to the government and wished for the chasm to be closed. If the Constitution could not be restored to its original intentions, however, Smith predicted the government would be short-lived. Hayne added that the crisis had come to a question of whether the federal government would be limited or centralized and that the sovereign, independent state of South Carolina would not tolerate the latter.90

South Carolina’s protest strengthened the resolve of anti-tariff editors, who used ideas from the exposition and the speeches of their Congressmen in their continued attacks against the acts and anyone who favored them. The exposition heightened the tension among South Carolina, the federal government, and the manufacturing states. Conflict was the dominant theme that emerged in editorials and correspondence following the protest, pitting the state of South Carolina against an increasingly centralized government, the southern state against its northern counterparts, and adherents to the Union against those who advocated secession as a

90 5 Cong. Deb. 52-58 (1829).
lesser evil than loss of liberty. These conflicts fueled a violently partisan press that pinned their hopes for change on the heroic Jackson while blaming their sorrows on tariff author and potential presidential candidate Henry Clay.

**Reactions to the Protest**

Newspapers in South Carolina universally hailed the protest as a powerful statement of wrongs and injuries against the South, although their opinions differed on how effective it would be. In addition to detailing the state’s protest and her Senator’s speeches on the matter, the *Greenville Mountaineer* noted the protests of Virginia and Georgia and expressed confidence that the remonstrance of “three patriotic and important states” certainly would influence Congress to repeal the offensive law. Its editor believed nothing more than protest was necessary to achieve that end and expressed concern over the nullification proposal. He argued that only the federal judiciary, established for arbitration between states and the federal government, had the authority to declare a law of Congress null and void. If each state had the power to nullify laws, the proceedings of Congress would be reduced to nothing more than mere recommendations for the states’ adoption.  

Whereas the *Camden Journal*’s editor disagreed that the protest was enough to provoke redress of wrongs against the South, he echoed the *Mountaineer* editor’s arguments against nullification. He objected on the grounds that paramount sovereignty does not reside in the state legislature and that “such a step, thus rashly taken, might have bound the State to a course of action, which would have been dangerous to its tranquility, and mournful to every true patriot.”

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91 *Greenville Mountaineer*, 24 January 1829, p. 3, 21 February 1829, p. 3, 28 February 1829, p. 3, 7 March 1829, p. 3.
The “most firm, popular and republican course of action,” he maintained, was a convention of the people, with whom all the power and sovereignty resided.\(^92\)

The *Columbia Telescope* and *Charleston Mercury*, on the other hand, were more open to radical action by the state legislature. The *Telescope*’s editor argued that a mere protest would not force Congress to redress the grievances of the “oppressed south.” He declared that “unless the State can relieve herself by some effort of her own from the manacles which are fastened upon her by the majority of Congress—we are unquestionably prostrate forever.” The *Mercury*’s editor concurred, remarking that South Carolina should not be reviled for “the stand she has taken against measures, which she not only sincerely regards as gross infractions of the national compact, but which threaten, in their operation, the utter destruction of her welfare and prosperity.” He encouraged the southern states to persevere in their endeavors to obtain redress and to accept nothing less than full repeal of the odious law.\(^93\)

*Sovereign States versus the Federal Government*

In the wake of the Exposition and Protest, many newspapers continued to harp on the unjust and oppressive tariff, as well as its effects on foreign commerce and the domestic economy. Increasingly, editorials and letters lumped internal improvements and other offensive government acts together with the tariff as elements of an “American System” that threatened the sovereignty of the southern states.

Responding to correspondence printed in the *Beaufort Gazette* complaining that other papers had been relatively silent on the tariff issue, the *Charleston Mercury*’s editor pointed out that scarcely an issue passed in which there was not something either original or copied on the

\(^92\) *Camden Journal*, 3 January 1829, p. 2.
\(^93\) “Congress,” *Columbia Telescope*, 2 January 1829, p. 3; *Charleston Mercury*, 20 February 1829, p. 2.
subject. “We have never relaxed our opposition to the iniquitous system forced upon the South,” he wrote.  

Columbia’s Telescope also remained diligent in its opposition to “this odious system of impost, intended to put the money of the public into the pockets of those who gull and deceive them.” Among the Telescope’s arguments was that the tariff was intended to bring the poor under absolute dominion of the rich, making the powerful even more so. Its editor also insisted that Congress could not constitutionally “burden with taxation one of the great component interests of the Union for the benefit of another.” The Constitution never would have been ratified had the states understood that it was formed for the benefit of New England and the middle states rather than for the general interests of the nation.

Some newspapers began publishing in response to the crisis, including the Greenville Mountaineer and the Cheraw Republican. In its opening issue, the Mountaineer’s editor proclaimed to always have been of the opinion that the tariff was unwise, partial, and oppressive to the southern states. He explained that it was unjust to lay duties specifically for the protection of commercial, agricultural or manufacturing interests. The Republican’s prospectus expressed comparable opinions, arguing that the Constitution had been made “the instrument of partial and unequal legislation…with especial injustice upon the interest of the South.”

The Pendleton Messenger’s editor found the tariff similarly unjust. He noted that equal encouragement and protection should be afforded to agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing, but that the tariff gave unequal support to the manufacturers. In doing so, the system prostrated

94 Charleston Mercury, 4 August 1829, p. 2.  
the interests of the South. The Messenger particularly found fault in the unequal distribution of surplus to be generated by the tariff. Its editor pointed out that South Carolina would receive $1 for every four paid in, whereas other states would receive $4 to 1. “Such an appropriation of the revenue would be most palpably unjust,” he declared.  

Georgetown’s Winyaw Intelligencer also argued against the uneven benefit of the tariff. Its editor noted that South Carolinians were suffering curtailed profits and diminished estates thanks to the “ruinous measures” and complained that the South was being forced to pay taxes not for their benefit but for that of the western and northern states.  

The tariff’s effect on foreign commerce was a major point in writers’ arguments that the act oppressed the South. The Mountaineer’s editor lamented that the tariff was calculated to destroy foreign commerce and argued that proponents of northern manufacturing deceived the public by telling them that they had to purchase domestic cotton goods. He provided evidence that cotton items still could be purchased more cheaply from abroad than from northern manufacturers, encouraging consumers to purchase imports. A writer for the Telescope advanced a similar argument, but the Telescope’s editor focused primarily on the export of raw cotton. He reminded readers that plenty of competition existed for the British market, making the cultivation of cotton unprofitable for those who depended on it for their livelihoods. The Winyaw Intelligencer concurred, calling the tariff’s destruction of the British export market “a new source of depreciation in our property, and the consequent destruction of our remaining comforts.”

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97 Pendleton Messenger, 9 July 1829, p. 3, 15 July 1829, p. 3, 30 December 1829, p. 3.
98 Winyaw Intelligencer, 5 August 1829, p. 2.
As opposition to the tariff grew increasingly vehement, editors railed against other Congressional issues that demonstrated excessive government power, particularly internal improvements. A *Columbia Telescope* editorial on governmental reform proclaimed the people of the country to be tired of a patronizing administration that transfers the earnings of 20 men to the purse of one, “which is to beautify and enrich a few powerful states by the fertilizing stream of internal improvement appropriations.” The *Telescope* editor thought it “utterly absurd” to imagine that a state would give Congress the power of executing a system of federal improvements within her borders and considered attempts to do so a portion of “the great machinery which is intended to screw down upon us the tariff policy forever.”

Although internal improvements in general drew ire from the South Carolina editors, two in particular found frequent opposition on the pages of the state’s newspapers. One was the Cumberland Road bill, which proposed the establishment of toll gates on a road in Virginia. The *Mountaineer* declared the law “more glaringly unconstitutional than the Tariff” and asked why the government believed it had any right to exercise jurisdiction over the soil of a sovereign state. The *Telescope*’s editor called it a “stretch of federal prerogative, beyond even the wide limits which had already been assigned to this Hydra of that Republic” and warned, “Once admit the giant foot of usurpation within your enclosure and you will soon see the whole of its hideous form.”

The other offensive measure was a memorial of the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company requesting subscription of stock from the government. The state’s Congressmen disclaimed any interest in the request by the private company and proclaimed on the floor of Congress that they did not desire to share in the bounty intended by the bill due to the

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100 *Columbia Telescope*, 10 April 1829, p. 3, 17 April 1829, p. 3, 4 September 1829, p. 2.
101 *Greenville Mountaineer*, 7 March 1829, p. 3; *Columbia Telescope*, 17 April 1829, p. 3.
sovereignty of the state. The *Charleston Courier* thought the disclaimer was uncalled for, and the *Camden Journal* expressed that as long as other states were receiving a windfall from the government, South Carolina should share in the riches. Many South Carolina editors agreed with their representatives, however. The *Telescope* published several editorials cautioning South Carolina not to accept funds from the government. They expressed regret that “any body of individuals in the state should abandon her principles and disregard her dignity, and compromise her interest so far as to beg alms from Congress, which we all admit Congress has no right to give.” The editor could only hope that “our northern and western brethren, to whom the treasury belongs, holding our puny struggles in contempt, may not think us worth buying, at any price, and thus save us from the pollution of their money.”

A theme that emerged in many of the South Carolina newspapers was that the federal government was attempting to exercise more control than the Constitution allowed. The *Winyaw Intelligencer* framed the entire political battle as between “ultra-Federalists who push for a consolidation of power under the General Government and friends of state rights.” The latter perceived the original intention of the Constitution as assigning ultimate sovereignty to the states.

Fourth of July toasts published in the *Pendleton Messenger* and *Charleston Mercury* emphasized the state rights stance. Speakers noted that the general government had its appropriate place, “and when out if it is tyranny in disguise.” They heralded the Constitution as “the ark of safety” for the states, so long as it was construed according to its original meaning.

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102 *Charleston Courier*, 3 March 1829, p. 2; *Camden Journal*, 21 February 1829, p. 2; *Columbia Telescope*, 13 February 1829, p. 3, 27 February 1829, p. 3, 3 March 1829, p. 3. See also *Greenville Mountaineer*, 7 March 1829, p. 3.

103 *Winyaw Intelligencer*, 15 August 1829, p. 2.
and kept pure. The “American System” proved that some corrupt members of government were operating outside of constitutional bounds and threatening the rights of the sovereign states.\textsuperscript{104}

South Carolina newspaper editors devoted many columns to discussions of the tariff’s constitutionality after the \textit{National Intelligencer} published letters of former President James Madison, which declared that the federal compact authorized the passage of protective duties. The \textit{Mountaineer}’s editor found the tariff to be within the letter of the Constitution but a violation of its true meaning and spirit, in that each independent sovereignty that formed the Union expected equal protection and security of their rights and interests. The tariff defied those expectations. An editorial in the \textit{Camden Journal} expressed that nothing in Madison’s letters would “shake the opinion adopted more than ten years since, that the Federal Government has no such powers, as it claims, and which even Mr. Madison would accord it.” Writers for the \textit{Columbia Telescope} blamed Madison’s “waning life and faculties” for the letters, which the editor proclaimed denied the southern states the standard of their rights.\textsuperscript{105}

The \textit{Telescope}’s editor assigned to the states alone the right to foster and protect manufactures, declaring that authority outside the bounds of Congressional power. The \textit{Camden Journal} agreed, claiming that the “odious system of ‘protective duties’” robbed the several sovereign states of the powers reserved to them and trampled the rights of their citizens. The \textit{Telescope} asserted that the government needed to direct its energy toward restoring the constitutional rights to the people, and the \textit{Winyaw Intelligencer} declared that the people of

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Pendleton Messenger}, 9 July 1829, p. 3, 15 July 1829, p. 3; “Celebration of the Fourth of July,” \textit{Charleston Mercury}, 7 July 1829, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Greenville Mountaineer}, 17 January 1829, p. 3; \textit{Camden Journal}, 10 January 1829, p. 3; \textit{Columbia Telescope}, 16 January 1829, p. 3; Publius, “Mr. Madison’s Letters,” \textit{Columbia Telescope}, 9 January 1829, p. 3.
South Carolina had a duty to question why they had lost their constitutionally-afforded ability to self-govern.\textsuperscript{106}

As writers became increasing agitated by the situation, the idea of too much government control began to seem more and more dangerous. An editorial in the \textit{Winyaw Intelligencer} noted that the patriots of the revolution considered the claim of a right to interfere with their revenue and commerce “incompatible with their liberties and interests, and to be opposed at all risks and hazards.” The editor claimed it was known during the revolution, as it was during the tariff crisis, that when the government “ceased to be for the good of the people, it was no longer a \textit{Government}, but a \textit{Tyranny}.”\textsuperscript{107}

Many writers concurred that the government had in fact become tyrannical and asserted that the Union was in danger if the proper balance of power between state and nation was not restored. The editors of the \textit{Winyaw Intelligencer} and \textit{Columbia Telescope} cited Thomas Jefferson, who had warned against the federal government assuming too much control. They noted that Jefferson himself had declared the usurpation of rights by a tyrannical government an even greater catastrophe than breaking the Union apart. The \textit{Telescope} argued that if Jefferson still were alive, he would have “considered the hope of avoiding submission to an unlimited government as absolutely desperate and that further forbearance could not be indulged.” South Carolina’s protest did not threaten the Union, the \textit{Telescope}’s editor declared; it was the oppressors who had raised the clamor.\textsuperscript{108}

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\textsuperscript{106} “Domestic Manufactures in 1812 and 1828,” \textit{Columbia Telescope}, 29 May 1829, p. 2; \textit{Camden Journal}, 1 August 1829, p. 2; \textit{Columbia Telescope}, 1 May 1829, p. 2; \textit{Winyaw Intelligencer}, 12 September 1829, p. 2.  \\
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Winyaw Intelligencer}, 4 July 1829, p. 2; emphasis in original.  \\
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South versus North

A tyrannical centralized government was not the only enemy of oppressed South Carolinians. As “American System” policies began to tear at the threads of the Union, southern writers made the northern states a target for their venomous remarks.

By the summer of 1829, increased expenditures on foreign goods not manufactured in the United States combined with decreased income due to non-consumption pacts and rampant smuggling of foreign goods to the detriment of some northern manufacturers. South Carolina newspapers did little to hide their glee over their foe’s suffering. Independence Day toasts published in the Pendleton Messenger noted that the tariff was carrying bankruptcy into the ranks of the manufacturers and rejoiced that the manufacturing states were realizing their just rewards of poverty and disappointment. An editorial in the Messenger also pointed out that the manufacturers were suffering at least as severely as the southern planters, quipping, “The man recovered of the bite,/The dog it was that died.” Other newspapers published similar sentiments, noting the losses that the northern manufacturers were experiencing and expressing hope that the manufacturing woes would force tariff proponents to see the errors of their ways. The Camden Journal’s editor declared that the agricultural states must only wait quietly while the monopolists “beg as boisterously for relief from their own wicked policy as they have heretofore for its infliction upon others.”

Writers increasingly argued that the northern states had become partners in the oppressive tariff. The Columbia Telescope argued that northerners would not allow Congress to legislate for any benefit other than their own, regardless of how hurtful the result may be to the southern states. Editorials called Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and the New

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109 Pendleton Messenger, 9 July 1829, p. 3, 15 July 1829, p. 3, 26 August 1829, p. 3; “The Manufacturers,” Camden Journal, 6 June 1829, p. 3. See also Camden Journal, 24 December 1829, p. 2; Columbia Telescope, 31 July 1829, p. 2; Charleston Mercury, 1 July 1829, p. 2.
England states hypocrites for resisting encroachments on their rights but aiding in oppressing the South. As an example of “the fanaticism of some to usurp powers and meddle in the policy of another state,” the Telescope cited an editorial from a Cincinnati newspaper that lambasted the “aristocratic…southern slave driver” and hoped that one day the slaves would strike off their chains and “overwhelm their oppressors with fire and sword.” In fact, the Telescope blamed the “the bigotry of most of the presses in New England, the Middle States, and the West” for drawing a veil between the people of those sections and the South, reporting only negative things about the southern states rather than being truthful about their misfortunes and the reasons for them. Because of this “film of prejudice,” New Englanders had permitted themselves to be used “as instruments of oppression to the people south of the Potomac.” The Winyaw Intelligencer similarly accused New Yorkers of harboring a “strong sectional feeling, joined to the fanaticism on a particular subject,” and pleaded for other states as well as the general government to mind their own business: “If he is not a Carolinian, he has no business with the internal affairs of Carolina.”

Yet the South Carolina press found itself constantly under attack by northern opponents who perceived the state’s reaction to the tariff as hotheaded and threatening. As southerners endured accusations of inciting disunion, the newspapers turned the tables and accused northerners of instigating the clamor. Relaying a toast by a member of an organization of New York manufacturers that northern cotton was “fit for the necks of our opponents, and backs of our friends,” the Camden Journal’s editor responded, “The fellow who gave this toast ought to have a few pounds of his Northern cotton upon his bare back, after said cotton is twisted into

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110 Columbia Telescope, 13 March 1829, p. 2; 27 March 1829, p. 3; 3 April 1829, p. 2, 11 September 1829, p. 2; Charleston Mercury, 20 February 1829, p. 2; “New England – Sectional Feelings – Southern Treason,” Columbia Telescope, 14 August 1829, p. 2; Winyaw Intelligencer, 12 May 1829, p. 2, 10 June 1829, p. 2, 8 July 1829, p. 2.
inch rope, and well tarred.” The Journal’s editor found it ironic that the northern press had accused the southern citizens of speaking of their grievances in too strong a language, when northerners did the very same the moment their “blessed tariff is considered in danger,” in language far more incendiary than what was spoken in the South. He wondered why resistance to the laws of the country was treason only when talked about in the South and mused, “In this as in every thing else, the manufacturers of Cotton Shirting, and the patrons of pelt wool have the exclusive monopoly of insubordination.”111

According to the Columbia Telescope, claims that the South was responsible “for the present distracted state of the country” were “wicked and false.” The editor harped on the fact that southerners never had violated the Constitution or meddled in the domestic economy of any other state. They always had been peaceful, sharing liberally the bounties of their soil, climate, enterprise and labor. They had given a disproportionate share of exports to national wealth, furnishing the means for other states to make improvements, but never asked the government for bounties or donations. The South’s only crime was to be “a little restive under a system of robbery.” The editor argued, “It is asserted that we have raised a false alarm; but who asserts it? Those who are guilty of the crime.” He claimed that northerners’ interest and profession was “to attack personally all who are dangerous opponents, and whom they cannot answer in argument.”112

The Winyaw Intelligencer avowed that such a severe reproach against South Carolina was unwarranted when the state only aimed to protect herself, and by peaceful means at that. It was the proponents of monopoly that truly aimed to “come with torch and sword to enforce our

vassalage, & that too, we are given distinctly to understand, with more than the ordinary horrors of a civil war.”

**Disunionists versus Unionists**

Despite the claims that the opposition was to blame for instigating disunionist uproar, some South Carolina newspapers repeatedly expressed that the state of government and sectional relations left little hope of maintaining the Union. The editor of Columbia’s *Telescope* argued that usurpations of the federal government had stripped the states of their constitutionally-granted rights, which, once lost, “carry with them whatever is worth having under any government.” If the South was to be brought under the dominion of a distorted constitution by politicians with a federalist agenda, he continued, “the sooner we set ourselves free from such degrading tyranny, the better, and that at all hazards.” Although he claimed that no one wanted to separate the state from its country, whenever the original terms and purposes of the Constitution were essentially and permanently changed, Union could “no longer be desirable to any sensible, honest, or patriotic man.” The editor assured readers that secession would be peaceful but that the state would fight valiantly if other parties brought civil war to her door.

Similar sentiments appeared in other newspapers. The *Winyaw Intelligencer*’s editor declared that the Union should be defended as long is it was a true Union under the original Constitution. Under the circumstances, however, he proclaimed that anyone who “suffers his birthright of self-government to be taken away, has no claim to the name of Republican, still less to that of MAN.” Editorials in the *Camden Journal* warned that if the impolitic and

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113 *Winyaw Intelligencer*, 7 January 1829, p. 2; Palmetto, “For the Winyaw Intelligencer,” *Winyaw Intelligencer*, 14 February 1829, p. 2; *Winyaw Intelligencer*, 15 August 1829, p.2.

114 *Columbia Telescope*, 10 April 1829, p. 2, 8 May 1829, p. 2; Cotton, “Mr. Editor,” *Columbia Telescope*, 20 March 1829, p. 3; “Mr. Jefferson’s Protest,” *Columbia Telescope*, 4 September 1829, p. 2; *Columbia Telescope*, 18 September 1829, p. 2. See also *Columbia Telescope*, 16 October, 1829, p. 2, 13 November 1829, p. 2.
unconstitutional American System was not discarded, “all idea of preserving the stability of this Union must be abandoned.” Going a step further, the editor of the *Charleston Mercury*, predicted a moment when the opposing interests of arbitrary power and constitutional rights would engage in actual conflict.\textsuperscript{115}

Editors who spoke of disunion cited not only the federal government’s perversion of the Constitution, but also the hostility of northern states as justification for separating from the Union. The *Winyaw Intelligencer* declared the Union would not survive the assertion that one section could oppress another for its own benefit, and the *Camden Journal* agreed that “by the injustice and oppressiveness of its partial and unequal legislation,” the North had taken away nearly all inducements for clinging to the Union. Given the true feeling of the North towards the South, the *Telescope*’s editor contended, “the Southern man who would oppose separation from such an unnatural union, is a base coward and a traitor to the SOUTH.”\textsuperscript{116}

Although South Carolina editors universally detested the tariff, not all agreed that the oppressive legislation was a greater scourge than disunion. Items in the *Pendleton Messenger* demonstrated its district’s love of Union, including Independence Day toasts claiming the Union to be “second only to Liberty in the political prayer of a Southron” and calling for “zeal to preserve it entire.” Some toasts published in the *Charleston Courier* exhibited a similar theme, such as one proclaiming, “Our Motto, ‘United we stand, divided we fall’—In union and

\textsuperscript{115} *Winyaw Intelligencer*, 9 September 1829, p. 2; “President’s Message,” *Camden Journal*, 24 December 1829, p. 2; *Charleston Mercury*, 4 August 1829, p. 2, 19 November 1829, p. 2; emphasis in original.

\textsuperscript{116} *Winyaw Intelligencer*, 5 August 1829, p. 2; “Desertion of Southern Slaves,” *Camden Journal*, 8 August 1829, p. 2; *Columbia Telescope*, 5 June 1829, p. 2; “Northern Threats,” *Columbia Telescope*, 11 September 1829, p. 2; emphasis in original.
friendship the world cannot conquer us; but if disunion sows her baneful seeds among us, her richest fruits will be the destruction of the world’s fairest fabric.”

Editorials in the *Greenville Mountaineer* proclaimed public opinion in the back country to be “firm and unalterable in its opposition to the tariff,” but that the citizens there looked with “equal indignity on those, who would force us to some irretrievable issue with the general Government.” The editor asked that fellow South Carolinians respond to the oppressive tariff with a “cool, conciliatory spirit, and a fixed attachment to the institutions of our fathers on the one hand, and an inflexible determination to vindicate our rights as freemen on the other.” He declared the only appropriate mode of resistance to be non-consumption of northern goods.

In addition to boycotting northern manufactures, moderate South Carolinians called for the state to establish its own enterprise to resist the tariff. The editor of the *Pendleton Messenger* professed that successful industry within the state was adequate defiance of the acts. A writer for the *Courier* argued that flourishing homespun would “both add to our wealth and cement the bonds of Union.” Even the *Camden Journal* praised the establishment of manufactures, pointing out to tariffites who considered homespun an endorsement of the American System that the southern states had not forgotten their rights just because they had seen fit to forego them for a while rather than to endanger the Union. Nonetheless, the *Journal*’s editor argued, by investing in homespun, South Carolinians had determined “not to pay tribute much longer to Northern Spinning Jennies.”

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117 *Pendleton Messenger*, 26 August 1829, p. 3, 9 July 1829, p. 3, 15 July 1829, p. 3; *Charleston Courier*, 7 July 1829, p. 2. See also Anti-Cato, “The Value of the Union,” *Charleston Courier*, 15 October 1829, p. 2; emphasis in original.


Jackson versus Clay

A final conflict among newspaper editors in the year following the Exposition and Protest was between the supporters of Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay. The American System remained closely tied to partisan politics as Jackson began his tenure as president. Many South Carolina newspapers heaped praise upon the new chief magistrate and looked to the new administration for change, particularly a shift away from the federalist government they believed John Quincy Adams had instituted. Meanwhile, as murmurs arose of tariff author Clay seeking to run for the nation’s top office in 1832, the editors browbeat him for his role in the oppressive policy.

A celebratory tone marked Jackson’s inauguration. The Journal reported a “fine spontaneous party” that had erupted in Camden on the occasion, featuring toasts lauding the new president while deprecating Adams and Clay. At an inaugural party in Columbia, the Telescope noted, toasts upheld Jackson as a defender and protector of rights and the Union and his administration as a beacon of peace and tranquility as well as political honesty and integrity.  

The Camden Journal’s editor vowed to support the Jackson administration as long as its policy coincided with the paper’s philosophy, “for we have zealously rendered our feeble aid in elevating the great and good man at the head of it.” An editorial in the Greenville Mountaineer made a similar promise, pledging support as long as the administration promoted the public interest.

In the newspapers that offered unwavering support, Jackson’s war heroism remained an emphasis. Writers frequently tied his victory in battle to his ability to defeat the enemy of

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federalism. According to the *Columbia Telescope*’s editor, Jackson’s wartime glory established him as a “bold, powerful, cunning, and reckless leader, who will seize upon the flood of any tide that promises to lead on to fortune.” The *Winyaw Intelligencer* previewed a celebration to mark Jackson’s triumph in the 8 January 1815 Battle of New Orleans by noting that the newly-elected president was a “brave and patriotic old Soldier who merits and has received the highest evidence of the gratitude of the people.” An Independence Day toast in the Anderson/Pickens district labeled Jackson “the defender of his country from the foreign foe – the avenger of his countrymen from domestic intrigue; his enemies will find him as able in the cabinet as the field.” Other toasts compared Jackson to Washington and Jefferson, noting that, like the former, he had first won the country’s heart by saving her in a time of war, and like the latter, he would preserve her integrity in a time of peace.122

Only the *Charleston Courier* seemed to disagree that success on the battlefield would translate to presidential achievement. Its editor asserted that speeches in Charleston connecting the Battle of New Orleans victory with the presidency were uncalled for; “notwithstanding we glory in the one, we feel an honest conviction, that the General, who was the principal in achieving it, is unfit for the other.”123

Another Charleston paper, however, established itself as Jackson’s biggest fan. Unlike newspapers that promised their support to Jackson depending on his policy, the *Mercury* vowed undying devotion to the new administration. The editor professed to have zealously supported him throughout the election, from the very beginning and through “periods of the greatest doubt,” because “we believed him then, as we believe him now, far superior to Mr. Adams in all

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122 *Columbia Telescope*, 5 June 1829, p. 2, 27 November 1829, p. 3; *Winyaw Intelligencer*, 7 January 1829, p. 2; *Pendleton Messenger*, 9 July 1829, p. 3, 15 July 1829, p. 3.
123 *Charleston Courier*, 9 January 1829, p. 2. See also “From Our Correspondent,” *Charleston Courier*, 14 January 1829, p. 2.
the essential requisites for the Chief Magistracy of the Union.” One editorial claimed that the administration “may confidently be pronounced one of the most popular which has ever existed in this country,” and another, late in the year, described a presidential address to Congress as “destitute of a single irritating line. In a word, the Message is alike creditable to the head and to the heart of its patriotic and venerable author.”  

Newspapers commonly pitted Jackson against Clay and Adams, proclaiming the new regime’s superiority over the old. The *Mercury* heralded Jackson’s popularity versus the opposition, pointing out examples of whole states that had turned from Adams to Jackson. As the new president named his cabinet, the *Camden Journal* rejoiced that he was ridding the government of corrupt individuals from the Adams administration. The *Journal* warned Jackson opposition that his administration would “yet be the pride of his friends and his country, and the mortification and discomfiture of his enemies.” Similarly, the *Pendleton Messenger* crowed that Adams, Clay and their cohorts could “never shake the pillars of our Government whilst supported by Hickory.”  

Although Adams continued to be a target for press criticism after he left office, South Carolina editors began to aim their barbs at Clay more than any other alleged federalist. The *Greenville Mountaineer* declared that the South had more to fear from Clay than almost any other man, and that it behooved the people to scrutinize his actions closely. According to the *Camden Journal*, that Clay appeared a likely candidate for president in the next election provided all the more reason for alarm.

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124 *Charleston Mercury*, 8 July 1829, p. 2, 16 July 1829, p. 2, 7 November 1829, p. 2; “President’s Message,” *Charleston Mercury*, 14 December 1829, p. 2; emphasis in original.

125 *Charleston Mercury*, 7 November 1829, p. 2; *Camden Journal*, 2 May 1829, p. 2; “The Opposition,” *Camden Journal*, 10 October 1829, p. 2; *Pendleton Messenger*, 9 July 1829, p. 3. See also *Camden Journal*, 13 June 1829, p. 3, 7 November 1829, p. 2; emphasis in original.

126 *Greenville Mountaineer*, 29 March 1829, p. 3; *Camden Journal*, 2 May 1829, p. 3, 24 October 1829, p. 2.
Clay owed his vilification by the South Carolina press to their perception that he was largely responsible for the American System. The *Columbia Telescope* accused Clay of almost single-handedly inflicting oppression upon the South, claiming that he was the author of the system designed to depreciate agriculture. The editor charged Clay with raising up a monied aristocracy among northern manufacturers to serve “the purposes of a few ambitious and wicked men.” The *Winyaw Intelligencer* similarly tied the American System to Clay and chastised his supporters for “filling the papers with letters and statements about the excellence of our manufacturers, with a design, I suppose, to prove the wisdom of the gentleman and the excellence of the Tariff.” Supporters could be found, according to the *Intelligencer*, only in the “manufacturing aristocracy” of the north. The Winyaw editor challenged the “Clay party” to prove its devotion to the Union by joining the people of the South in putting down the “Restrictive system.”  

South Carolina newspapers also found fault in Clay’s hostility towards their beloved president. The *Telescope* indicted Clay for employing “disingenuous, violent and partizan [sic] means” to sap public confidence in the Jackson administration and “excite the people to absolute insurrection against the constituted authorities of the nation, if those authorities should not demean themselves in conformity to the American System.” The *Charleston Mercury* assured readers that any of the Clay party’s accusations against the administration were false, and that “being grievously disappointed in finding no just or even plausible grounds of accusation, they have become glaringly inconsistent, and childishly ridiculous, in their charges.”

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Criticisms of the Clay party extended to its partisan newspapers. The South Carolina press tied several national papers to the federalists and condemned their editorials favoring federal ideals. The *Telescope* labeled *Register* editor Hezekiah Niles a “redoubted knight of spinning jennies” and accused him of making the tariff a sectional issue with the ultimate goal of dissolving the Union. ¹²⁹ However, the *National Journal* and *National Intelligencer* were more frequent objects of denigration.

The *Columbia Telescope* called the *National Journal* “one of the most virulent and vindictive prints against the southern states which Mr. Adams and his party have at any time called into being to do his dirty work.” The *Telescope* and *Charleston Mercury* harped on the *National Journal* for its constant slandering of the Jackson administration, finding fault even where there was none. Furthermore, the *Winyaw Intelligencer* claimed that the *Journal* seemed “to regard the South as quite an unimportant portion of the confederacy.” Its temper toward the region was “far from conciliatory or gentlemanly,” and the Tariff was “the unfailing and inexhaustible source from which they draw the materials for their satire.”³³⁰

According to the *Telescope* editor, the *National Intelligencer* was even worse because it avowed affinity for the South yet promoted the tariff and vilified South Carolina and her newspapers. The *Charleston Mercury* called the *Intelligencer* the “organ of the opposition” and attributed to it the goal of teaching southerners “that their true glory consists in submitting magnanimously to an unconstitutional exercise of power.” When the *National Intelligencer* asked to be excused from exchanging with the *Mercury* and *Telescope*, presumably due to their “exposing its insidious hostility to the Southern States,” the *Mercury* promised it still would not

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¹³⁰ *Columbia Telescope*, 1 May 1829, p. 2, 8 May 1829, p. 2, 24 July 1829, p. 2; *Charleston Mercury*, 16 July 1829, p. 2, 7 November 1829, p. 2; *Winyaw Intelligencer*, 7 January 1829, p. 2.
“omit any occasion, which our judgment shall require it, to arraign [the Intelligencer] distinctly before the people of the South.”

South Carolina editors found partisan papers that fell on the “proper” side as well. The Charleston Mercury asserted that the people of the South would rally to support Condy Raguet “with equal firmness and determination” to what the eastern manufacturers afforded his federalist counterparts. Raguet first found favor among southern newspaper editors with his Free-Trade Advocate (Philadelphia), which the Columbia Telescope called “the only chance for the southern states to be heard in the North.” The Mercury and Telescope lamented that the paper had not found support among its home citizens—presumably because “speaking the southerner’s language in the tariff states is not allowed”—and encouraged South Carolinians to subscribe so that the important work could continue “exposing the absurdities and iniquities of Clay’s system.” The editors gave equal support to Raguet’s next venture, the Banner of the Constitution in Washington City, which the Telescope heralded as promoting a cause that was “peculiarly our own—the cause of equal rights, of the Constitution, of the Republic.”

While the Mercury and Telescope judged the relative merits of national newspapers, their editors became the target of criticism by a newspaper in their home state—the Charleston Courier. The Courier found itself in the minority of South Carolina newspapers in that it opposed the Jackson administration and its partisan press. The Courier’s editor and correspondents painted Jackson as a friend to the tariff and questioned why the Telescope and Mercury continued to support him. A letter to the Courier lamented that the Telescope was the organ not only of the administration, but also of the state legislature, which did not bode well for

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131 Columbia Telescope, 26 June 1829, p. 2; Charleston Mercury, 9 July 1829, p. 2, 28 July 1829, p. 2, 18 September 1829, p. 2. See also Winyaw Intelligencer, 1 July 1829, p. 2.

132 Charleston Mercury, 16 September 1829, p. 2; Columbia Telescope, 26 June 1829, p. 2, 8 May 1829, p. 2; “The Free Trade Advocate,” Columbia Telescope, 22 May 1829, p. 3; “Free Trade Advocate,” Charleston Mercury, 1 July 1829, p. 2; Columbia Telescope, 11 September 1829, p. 2.
the future peaceful action of the state. Other Courier letter-writers pointed out the Mercury editor’s own political aspirations and condemned him for tying tariff, constitution, and state rights issues to city politics, where they had no place.133

In the wake of the “South Carolina Exposition and Protest,” conflict intensified between editors who advocated resisting the tariff and those who believed the tariff was not odious enough to warrant a fight against the federal government. The more radical anti-tariff writers were bolstered by the Exposition, which echoed their arguments that the tariff was unconstitutional, unequal, and oppressive, and promoted state interposition if Congress did not repeal the act. Radical editors proclaimed to love the Union and wished to see it preserved, but only if the Constitution could be returned to its original purity. The tariff and internal improvements indicated a government of unlimited powers, and separation was the only way to preserve the rights of what the disunionists argued to be sovereign states. Disunion talk intensified as editors began to portray the northern states as hostile foes who partnered with the federal government to enact policies that would lead to the South’s downfall, resulting in the North’s economic and political domination. Parallels to the Revolutionary War era supported the push for resistance. The radical editors also began drawing from the doctrines of Thomas Jefferson, particularly his assertion that the usurpation of rights by a centralized government was worse than disunion. Newly-elected President Andrew Jackson served as the only calming influence, because the resistance press expected him to revolutionize the government and work toward the tariff’s repeal.

133 “From Our Correspondent,” Charleston Courier, 14 April 1829, p. 2; Argus, “Domestic Manufactures in 1812 & 1828,” Charleston Courier, 16 May 1829, p. 2; Charleston Courier, 16 June 1829, p. 2; Anti-Cato, “The Value of the Union,” Charleston Courier, 15 October 1829, p. 2; Civic, “The Junto and Their Address,” Charleston Courier, 3 September 1829, p. 2; A True Republican, “Mr. Editor,” Charleston Courier, 3 September 1829, p. 2; A Stockholder, “For the Courier,” Charleston Courier, 9 December 1829, p. 2.
More conservative newspapers continued refuting the arguments of the disunionists and recommending moderate alternatives such as refusing to purchase northern goods and establishing homespun industry. These writers denied that individual states had the right to declare the laws of the federal government null and void, arguing that only the federal judiciary had that power. Moderate writers also accused their radical counterparts of deceiving the public on purpose, knowing full well that the tariff was not all that harmful, and maintained that the state had no right to intercede even if it was.

A correspondent writing in the *Charleston Courier* as “A Stockholder” posited that the state’s politicians and their mouthpieces in print aimed only to “keep alive an excitement, which time was gradually smothering.” As long as the tariff remained in effect, however, excitement not only would remain alive but continue to escalate. The American System became a source for ever more heated debate as the politicians vied for South Carolina state offices in 1830.

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4. NULLIFICATION, CONVENTION, AND THE ELECTION OF 1830

South Carolina’s newspaper editors began 1830 with a watchful eye on Congress. Lacking agreement on whether or how to resist the American System, South Carolinians only could hope that the federal government would hear their pleas and alleviate their suffering through repeal of the hated import duties. Their hopes were dashed in January, when the House’s Committee on Manufactures presented a report declaring any alteration to the existing tariff law inexpedient.135

Although the Greenville Mountaineer’s editor perceived from the report’s wording that the friends of the system were “evidently alarmed” and the system was “beginning to totter,” other writers responded less positively. An editorial in the Charleston Mercury called the report “a death blow to all hopes of modification of the system” and predicted that the “system of consolidation will be fixed upon us, under which the Southern states, taxed and oppressed for the benefit of the manufacturers, can not fail to sink into a deplorable state of poverty and degradation.” The report’s true aim may even have been to increase the tariffs at a later date, according to the Camden Journal. The editor accused tariff supporters on the committee of squashing debate to avoid replying to “some of the unanswerable abominations of the present tariff” and posited that the tariffites “may probably get more plunder hereafter, if they will just ‘hush’ for a little while.”136

Editors’ ire increased in February, when the House immediately and decisively tabled a bill South Carolina Rep. George McDuffie proposed to reduce the tariff. The *Pendleton Messenger*’s editor believed Congress simply wanted to avoid a “long and stormy” debate, which would not come to much because of majority support for the duties. Columbia’s *Southern Times* and the *Charleston Mercury* pinned more sinister motives on Congressmen who “shamefully gagged” discussion on the proposed tariff modification, and both editors called South Carolinians to action. “No man, not wilfully [sic] blind, can longer look to congress for redress,” the *Times* proclaimed. The *Mercury* concurred, offering the “gag law” as proof that “the longer oppression is submitted to, the more rigorously will it continue to be extended and enforced.” Its editor called for the South to rise up “as sovereign members of a violated league.”

Despite what the *Pendleton Messenger* perceived as attempts of the Congressional majority to dispose of all efforts at tariff discussion, the *Camden Journal* declared that Vermont Rep. Rollin Mallary’s proposed anti-smuggling resolution provided an opportunity for the anti-tariff members to “cudgel the monster in his own den” by sneaking the tariff into the debate. The Carolinian McDuffie proposed a substitute resolution that would gradually reduce the duties to the level passed in 1816. The *Charleston Mercury* proclaimed the ensuing debate to be “a struggle for life or death” and insisted the continuance of the Union depended on the outcome. When Congress defeated McDuffie’s measure, the *Southern Times* asserted, “If anything had yet been wanting to convince us of the idiotic folly of reposing a hope for relief of the South, elsewhere than in her own State Sovereignties—here it would be amply supplied.”

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137 6 Cong. Deb. 555, 556 (1830); *Pendleton Messenger*, 10 February 1830, p. 3, 24 February 1830, p. 3; *Southern Times* (Columbia), 25 February 1830, p. 3; *Charleston Mercury*, 16 February 1830, p. 2, 19 February 1830, p. 2. See also *Greenville Mountaineer*, 13 February 1830, p. 3.
correspondent to the *Mercury* invited those who hoped for “the returning sense of justice of our Northern brethren” to visit Washington for “a radical cure of the delusion.”

Even when Congress voted to reduce duties on several items, the newspapers responded pessimistically. According to the newspaper editors, the reduction of duties on tea, coffee, cocoa, salt, and molasses was a triumph for the tariff party, not the South. Editorials appearing in the *Winyaw Intelligencer, Charleston Mercury, Southern Times, Camden Journal,* and *Greenville Mountaineer* unanimously proclaimed that the decreases were for the benefit of northern consumers and New England shipping interests who found those duties inconvenient.

Furthermore, the editors contended that the tariffites’ goal was to diminish the national revenue, thus extending the time required to pay off the national debt and providing a pretext for continuing the American System. The *Mountaineer* later decided that Congress’s actions late in the session augured “very strongly the downfall of that system of high protecting duties,” while the *Times* and *Mercury* remained vigilant in their call for South Carolinians to resist the tariffs entirely, lest the systemizers view their forbearance as submission and justification for oppressive actions.

Editors had little hope of Congress reversing its policy on internal improvements, either. The *Pendleton Messenger* asserted that the people of the South might not complain as much about the tariffs if the funds collected from them benefited the entire nation, rather than being distributed for internal improvements on a sectional basis. An editorial in the *Charleston Mercury* warned that if “instead of respecting the sovereignty of the States,” Congress continued

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138 H.R. 164, 21st Cong. (1830); *Pendleton Messenger*, 31 March 1830, p. 3; *Camden Journal*, 8 May 1830, p. 2; *Charleston Mercury*, 8 May 1830, p. 2; *Southern Times*, 20 May 1830, p. 3; “Extract of a letter to the Editor, dated WASHINGTON, May 6, 1830,” *Charleston Mercury*, 13 May 1830, p. 2.

to “invade their soil, and carry on works of this kind within them against their consent,” there
would be only one mode of redress by which the southern states could “save themselves from
perpetual plunder and extortion”—becoming separate, distinct and independent sovereignties.140

Much like the reduction of various duties failed to calm the South Carolina editors’
attacks against the tariff, President Andrew Jackson’s veto of the Maysville Road bill did little to
diminish the editors’ hatred of internal improvements. The *Camden Journal* praised the
president for recognizing that the road linking Lexington to the Ohio River was a local work that
affected Kentucky alone, not the nation, and that the present state of the treasury precluded
appropriating such an enormous amount of funds. The *Journal*’s editor wished, however, that the
president had acknowledged the General government did not have the Constitutional right to
“pursue these wild schemes of money spending.” Therefore, editors in Charleston, Columbia,
Georgetown, Pendleton, and Cheraw claimed that Jackson fell short of arresting “the tide of
extravagance and corruption.” An editorial in the *Southern Times* noted that the president had
affirmed the practice of appropriating for internal improvements of a national nature within the
states. The *Cheraw Republican* cited outcry in response to the veto as proof that systemizers thus
would not stop pushing for such expenditures, filled as they were with “the inflexible
determination…to enforce their opinions even at the hazard of the Union; to be discouraged by
no defeat—to despair at no reverse.” The *Winyaw Intelligencer*’s editor called the act a
temporary obstruction to a mountain torrent, while the *Times* declared, “The veto has lopped off
but a single twig from the tree, from which innumerable sprouts will shoot forth.” According to
the *Mercury*, southerners needed to adhere to their principles and “struggle for their rights with

140 *Pendleton Messenger*, 4 August 1830, p. 2; *Charleston Mercury*, 9 April 1830, p. 2, 17 April 1830, p. 2.
redoubled zeal,” because complete abolition of the protective system depended on their firmness and perseverance.¹⁴¹

Not all South Carolina newspapers met the veto with gloom. The Greenville Mountaineer called the proscription “a mighty triumph for the South” in that it spelled the downfall of internal improvements and provided evidence that the good sense of the American people was returning. The editor declared that “the clouds and tempests have blown away, leaving our political horizon fairer and brighter than ever,” and urged patience and forbearance until the tariff party’s delusion had time to pass. Writers in both the Mountaineer and Charleston Courier pleaded with influential citizens to restore peace and contentment in the state. A common argument was that the southern states were not enduring the great and unequal burden that the people were led to believe, and even if they were, the suffering was not enough to warrant the excitement that existed. A writer called “R” in the Mountaineer and a Courier correspondent with the pseudonym “Moultrie” accused certain newspapers of spreading what they knew to be fallacies in order to keep up the ferment. Moultrie declared that all the prosperous state of South Carolina needed to be peaceful and happy was to “get rid of about one dozen of hot headed, ambitious, weak, turbulent and reckless men; who, by repeating Ruin, Northern monopoly, Plunder, and such hard words, actually have contrived to fright the state from its propriety.”¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ 6 Cong. Deb. 133-142 (1830); Camden Journal, 12 June 1830, p. 2; Charleston Mercury, 3 June 1830, p. 2, 19 June 1830, p. 2; Southern Times, 7 June 1830, p. 3; “Twenty-First Congress,” Southern Times, 10 June 1830, p. 3; Winyaw Intelligencer, 9 June 1830, p. 2, 12 June 1830, p. 2; “The Veto,” Cheraw Republican, reprinted in Winyaw Intelligencer, 16 June 1830, p. 2; Pendleton Messenger, 25 August 1830, p. 2.
But a new aspect of the American System assured that unrest would continue by providing the South Carolina editors with additional certainty that little hope remained of relief for the South or of restraint to federal usurpation. Measures proposed in Congress to abolish slavery in Washington City and to appropriate for the shipment of freed slaves back to Africa drew the most violent editorials of the Congressional session, even from the most pacific of newspapers. The *Winyaw Intelligencer* and *Southern Times* tied the anti-slavery proposals directly to the tariff, arguing that the South was being punished for refusing to “be taxed at [the North’s] pleasure, and for their benefit,” and that the tariff system would continue thanks to the northerners’ hatred of southern plantations. These assumptions fueled editors’ calls for resistance. The *Intelligencer* editor proclaimed the South to be “at the feet of the majority, who having destroyed the Constitution, are now preparing to crush us with its fragments.” *Times* editorials on the slavery bills in Congress warned that if the measures passed, southerners would not “stop to ‘nullify’ or seek constitutional forms of resistance; but will shiver the Union and trample the Constitution under foot sooner than submit.” The typically even-tempered *Greenville Mountaineer* editor concurred that if Congress passed laws interfering with slavery, the federal government would have become such an unlimited power that the southern states would have to revolt. None of the newspapers claimed to want disunion, but the *Charleston Mercury* argued that southerners had borne all they could, and “their very forbearance has been made the pretext for new outrages.” He pronounced that they would submit no longer; if the South could not remain in the Union on equal terms, they would prefer no Union at all. Time had come, the editors insisted, for the State to consider what course to pursue to avoid being subjected to a government of absolute power.  

143 “Slavery.” *Southern Times*, 15 April 1830, p. 2-3; *Southern Times*, 19 April 1830, p. 3, 6 May 1830, p. 3, 17 May 1830, p. 3; *Greenville Mountaineer*, 30 April 1830, p. 2; *Charleston Mercury*, 8 May 1830, p. 2, 21 May
Webster-Hayne Debates, Nullification and State Sovereignty

Deciding the appropriate course was no small task. Although a majority of editors agreed that something had to be done to arrest the current of government oppression, few concurred on what to do. The most contentious principle was that South Carolina could, in her sovereign capacity, declare the laws of the General government unconstitutional. A great debate surrounding this tenet appeared in the state’s newspapers as one of her senators argued the same notion in the halls of Congress. A resolution proposed by Connecticut Sen. Samuel Augustus Foot to restrict the sale of public lands set off a conflict regarding state sovereignty among several senators, primarily Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina and Daniel Webster of Massachusetts. Although Webster agreed that unconstitutional laws should be resisted, he argued that the federal judiciary alone had the power to decide on the constitutionality of federal laws. Furthermore, he posited that if a state declared a law void, it would have to resort to military power to prevent the nation from enforcing the law within her limits, and civil war must follow. Webster proclaimed that the survival of the Union was more important than individual liberties. Hayne contended that the general government should not have the power of determining the extent of its own powers with no check but the revolutionary right of the people. Hayne did not think it revolutionary for a state to nullify a law within its own borders only; such a power was necessary for the protection of the State, and sovereign states were worthy to be trusted with such a power.144

Most South Carolina editors perceived Webster’s speeches to be an attack on their state and defended against them. Like Hayne, the Winyaw Intelligencer, Southern Times, and

1830, p. 2; Winyaw Intelligencer, 4 May 1830, p. 2, 26 May 1830, p. 2; emphasis in original.
Charleston Mercury declared the Carolina doctrine to be far more moderate than Webster asserted. Nullification merely declares a law unconstitutional and void within the state’s borders, they argued; it does not declare the state separate from the Union. The Mercury’s editor asked, “Is there no alternative between unqualified submission to unconstitutional oppression, and a separation of the Union? Can we not assert our rights, or redress our grievances, and yet remain within the Confederacy?” Editorials in the Intelligencer accused Webster of attempting to frighten the people into submission through false accusations of revolution and argued that submitting would destroy the Union more than nullification would, because “there is small friendship between subdued provinces and their despotic masters.” The Times editor posited that the people had hesitated to nullify in the past because they were alarmed at the prospect of disunion and convinced by the northern presses that secession was the Nullifiers’ aim. If the people could be convinced that nullification was a peaceful measure, both editors believed the state would adopt it. An editorial in the Times told the state’s politicians that they were contributing to the fear with their “fiery ebullitions” on government usurpation and that they should divert their energy toward proving to the citizens that the state had the power to resist without revolting.145

The editors in Georgetown, Columbia and Charleston also asserted their belief that the state has paramount authority. “Our allegiance is to her, and we know nothing of the General government, except from the adhesion to it of South Carolina,” declared the Intelligencer’s editor. If Webster was right and South Carolina yielded up her sovereignty when entering the confederacy, the Southern Times avowed, “she has made a desperately bad bargain, and the

145 Charleston Mercury, 24 June 1830, p. 2; Winyaw Intelligencer, 6 March 1830, p. 2; “Nullifying Law,” Winyaw Intelligencer, 13 March 1830, p. 2; “Disunion,” Winyaw Intelligencer, 17 July 1830, p. 2; Winyaw Intelligencer, 25 August 1830, p. 2; “Nullification and Its Effects,” Southern Times, 10 May 1830, p. 2; Southern Times, 22 February 1830, p. 2.
sooner she can get rid of it, upon fair terms, the better.” Its editor believed the only way to hold the Union together was to fully acknowledge the right of the States to protect themselves from unjust and oppressive legislation “before all the ancient love between Northern and Southern brethren (by courtesy) has expired.” Against arguments that the Federal Judiciary can arbitrate between states and nation, the Times declared that the Supreme Court only possesses supremacy over other courts, not the laws and constitutions of the states or nation. Appealing to readers’ reverence for the nation’s founding fathers, the Winyaw Intelligencer and Charleston Mercury cited the Declaration of Independence and Constitution as well as the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions that Thomas Jefferson and James Madison penned in the late 1790s as sources for the belief that the states had the right to judge infractions of the Constitution and interpose for maintaining their liberties. The editors asserted that these documents offered nullification specifically as a rightful remedy. A Mercury editorial predicted that the more the question was agitated, the more certain the triumph of nullification doctrines would become.146

On the other hand, the Charleston Courier lauded Webster’s speeches as an unanswerable defense of the Constitution against destruction by the state legislatures and an exhibit of “the fatal consequences of the contemplated State usurpation.” Writers in both the Courier and the Camden Journal expressed disbelief that the nullification papers intended anything less than disunion. Editorials in the Journal called nullification absurd and proclaimed there to be no difference between it and rebellion. The editor affirmed the state’s right to secede, but he questioned whether the oppressions heaped upon her citizens had become sufficiently intolerable to warrant such a step. If they had, he declared, the state should secede outright and

146 “Mr. Hayne and Mr. Webster,” Southern Times, 15 March 1830, p. 3; “State Rights,” Southern Times, 1 April 1830, p. 2; Southern Times, 3 June 1830, p. 3; Winyaw Intelligencer, 24 March 1830, p. 2, 28 April 1830, p. 2; “Nullification,” Charleston Mercury, 25 March 1830, p. 2; Charleston Mercury, 2 April 1830, p. 2; emphasis in original. See also “Nullification,” Winyaw Intelligencer, 2 June 1830, p. 2, and Charleston Mercury, 10 February 1830, p. 2, 25 March 1830, p. 2.
not mask it with nullification. “Let not the citizens of South Carolina be drawn into a bloody collision with her sister States, by any pitiful indirection—by pursuing measures ostensibly peaceful, but in their nature necessarily and inevitably warlike,” he proclaimed.

Letters poured into the *Courier* blaming the state’s excitement not on Webster or the northern presses, but on the state’s nullification papers. A letter signed “Washington” lamented that a few men of the state had so long and loudly cried about state rights and the tariffs that they had worked themselves into a frenzy and made themselves erroneously believe that South Carolina depended on the power of the State to nullify the acts of Congress. Washington cautioned readers that “wisdom shrinks from extremes, and fixes on a medium as her choice.” Several writers responded to nullification papers’ claims that resistance was the true Carolina doctrine and that anyone against the measure was against the state. The *Courier*’s editor asked, “Shall we be deemed opposed to Southern rights and interests, because we would not apply a torch to the temple of our Liberty, and destroy by one incendiary act, the last refuge of human freedom? Southern rights and interests need no such sacrifice.” He declared perpetuity of the Union to be essential to the future prosperity of the state but feared that the disunion forces that controlled some of the state’s presses, particularly in Columbia, would prevent the people from hearing moderate, Unionist arguments. Correspondents supported that stance, calling on the state’s citizens to “shake off those wild delusions which are circulated to madden her passions, and precipitate her into errors from which it will be painful to recede and ruinous to prosecute.” Although against the tariff, these Charleston writers supported only peaceful and constitutional

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147 “Mr. Webster’s Speech,” *Charleston Courier*, 9 March 1830, p. 2; “Nullification,” *Camden Journal*, 3 July 1830, p. 3; *Camden Journal*, 4 September 1830, p. 2.
measures to set it right, and they asserted that nullification was neither. A writer in the *Pendleton Messenger* advanced similar claims.\(^{148}\)

The *Greenville Mountaineer*’s editor latched onto Webster’s idea of arbitration by the federal judiciary and penned several editorials advocating it as a peaceful alternative to nullification. He claimed the federal convention made the judiciary the interpreter and guardian of the Constitution in order to prevent tyranny, revolutions, and civil wars. Furthermore, he posited that states are not independent sovereignties because they do not have the authority to do anything and everything they pleased; they could be considered sovereign only in the exercise of their reserved rights, and declaring laws unconstitutional was not one of them. The editor argued that the Constitution makes it “utterly impossible for such a power to exist in the States” and noted that James Madison denied writing anything akin to South Carolina’s doctrine of nullification. Like the Camden editor, the *Mountaineer*’s chief posited that the state had a right to secede “peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must” if it became clear that the government had adopted a fixed and settled policy “which must inevitably ruin and crush us to the earth if we continue members of this Union.” He did not think that time had come, though. The proper course, he contended, was to join with other southern states to decide on a peaceful and constitutional means of redress.\(^{149}\)

\(^{148}\) Washington, “Mr. Editor,” *Charleston Courier*, 25 March 1830, p. 2; “Mr. Editor,” *Charleston Courier*, 16 February 1830, p. 2; *Charleston Courier*, 17 May 1830, p. 2, 18 June 1830, p. 2, 21 July 1830, p. 2; South Carolina, “For the Courier,” *Charleston Courier*, 15 June 1830, p. 2; Carolina, “For the Courier,” *Charleston Courier*, 18 June 1830, p. 2; The Democrats of Charleston, “To the Honest Old State Rights Party Throughout the Union,” *Charleston Courier*, 25 August 1830, p. 2; A Man, “They are against Carolina,” *Charleston Courier*, 30 July 1830, p. 2; Another of the People, “For the Courier,” *Charleston Courier*, 25 August 1830, p. 2; Samuel Augustus Maverick, “To the Editor of the Messenger,” *Pendleton Messenger*, 28 July 1830, p. 3.

**Legislative Election and Possible Convention**

As the state’s citizens celebrated Independence Day, toasts throughout the state harped on the oppressions most South Carolinians perceived the government had heaped upon them as well as those they saw coming in the future. Those who believed in a government of limited powers had to bear not only the tariffs and internal improvements, but also potential infringement on the right to own slaves. The *Southern Times*, now merged with another Columbia paper to become the *Southern Times and State Gazette*, rejoiced that the state’s celebrations from sea board to mountaintop rang out with the near unanimous cry, “Some way or other we must resist!” As newspaper columns following the Webster-Hayne debates foretold, however, the means of resistance was by no means undisputed. Whereas some toasters advocated secession or nullification, others vehemently spoke out in favor of preserving the Union from such fanatical doctrines. Some toasts advocated a third option that some saw as a compromise between the Unionists and Nullifiers: a convention of the state’s most upstanding citizens to decide the course to be pursued.\(^{150}\)

It was no compromise, though. Editors who saw the American System with all its oppressions as less harmful than disunion assigned the same dangers to a convention that they did to nullification. Just as the *Camden Journal*’s editor had argued that nullification was but a mask for secession, he assigned the same ruse to a convention. He called “those who would push this people to the very verge of Revolution” delusional and pronounced, “Well may the patriot tremble upon the brink of such a precipice.” Editorials in the *Charleston Courier* and *Greenville Mountaineer* advanced the same arguments, declaring that a convention in fact would result in nullification, which would lead to war against the federal government. The *Courier’s* editor

\(^{150}\) “The Prospect Before Us,” *Southern Times and State Gazette*, 19 July 1830, p. 2-3; *Pendleton Messenger*, 7 July 1830, p. 2; *Greenville Mountaineer*, 16 July 1830, p. 2.
proclaimed that even the odious tariff did not justify such measures. The *Mountaineer’s* chief and one of his correspondents agreed; they reiterated the good that had been accomplished during the last session of Congress and emphasized that the American System was tottering. If it did not, the Greenville editor concurred with his Camden counterpart that the state should throw off the mask of nullification and go straight to its inevitable result of secession.  

The most outspoken advocates of nullification proved to be the most ardent supporters of a convention as well. When the *Southern Times* and *State Gazette* merged, the Times’s editor told his new readers of his distinct object: “to advocate a convention, to be called by the next Legislature, and gifted by the people with full powers to devise ways and means to free them from their present enormous burdens.” He considered a convention to be the best remedy because it would express the will of the people on the subject. If the people chose nullification or submission, the editor believed the extremists on each end would be more likely to accept the decision than if it came from the legislature. On the other hand, he answered fears that a convention necessarily would result in forcible resistance by saying that merely calling a convention pledged the state to nothing in particular. The editor also questioned why the anti-convention editors could not trust their fellow citizens with convening to express their desires under the weight of oppression. He argued that if they could not do so, “we cannot see that there is any longer a hope of self government, or of elevating a republic above a tyranny of demagogues.” The Columbia editor called the anti-conventioners “weak and timid” and accused them of shrinking “from the responsibility involved in a firm defence [sic] of our rights.”

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declared any action short of calling a convention would amount to submission, which would fix the oppressive system upon the South for good.\textsuperscript{152}

Though not as vehement in their arguments, editors in Pendleton and Georgetown promoted the convention with much of the same reasoning as their Columbia brother, proclaiming a convention to be the only way to leave the matter to the people. Editorials in both papers explained that a convention was nothing more than a meeting of citizens, who would, through reasoned deliberation, decide on the best course. No course was set, they insisted. The editors declared the government a failure if the people were not allowed the opportunity to govern themselves. They also proclaimed undiminished attachment to the Union and the belief that a convention would preserve it by finding a peaceable means of instigating repeal of the American System.\textsuperscript{153}

Regardless of his stance, each editor pointed to the next session of the legislature as an important one for deciding the state’s fate. The \textit{Southern Times} proclaimed that South Carolina could not stand with dignity or honor beyond the legislative session; to refuse action then was to submit. Another Columbia paper, the \textit{Telescope}, concurred, noting that the people of the state should be prepared for the legislature to throw off the current “system of plunder and robbery” via means that could lead to bloodshed. The Unionist \textit{Charleston Courier} responded that the people needed to be aware of what their legislature intended and “rise in the majesty of their strength to prostrate the evil disposed.” According to the \textit{Greenville Mountaineer}, this responsibility of resolving the conflicting dangers of “dissolution of the Union by hastiness and


violence” and “loss of liberties by an absolute submission to the tyranny under which we groan” made the session “the most important certainly of any since the Revolution.”¹⁵⁴

Such weight placed upon the legislative session elevated the significance of the October 1830 election for state legislators. Writers in the Pendleton Messenger implored its readers to take their suffrage seriously, cast aside personal and party affiliations, and select “men of intelligence and firmness, who will dare to think for themselves.” A correspondent to the Columbia Telescope instructed voters to select moderate candidates, excluding both the overly conservative and the overly hostile members that had “paralyzed our legislative efforts, dishonored the State, and by a want of moral course, degraded the character of South-Carolina.”¹⁵⁵

As support for and opposition to a convention gained steam, editorials and correspondence on both sides of the issue noted that the elections would turn upon the question of whether the people wanted their legislators to call one. Whereas convention advocates called for readers to vote for legislators who would protect the state’s rights and fight for the citizens’ liberty, convention opponents implored voters to choose representatives dedicated to preserving peace and the Union.¹⁵⁶

Throughout the state, newspapers called on the candidates of their respective districts to express their opinions on the constitutionality and oppressiveness of the American System,

¹⁵⁴ Southern Times, 14 June 1830, p. 3; Columbia Telescope, reprinted in the Charleston Courier, 16 February 1830, p. 2; Charleston Courier, 16 February 1830, p. 2; Public Spirit, “The Next Legislature,” Greenville Mountaineer, 23 July 1830, p. 3.
¹⁵⁵ Pendleton Messenger, 9 June 1830, p. 3; One of the People, “For the Messenger,” Pendleton Messenger, 16 June 1830, p. 3; South-Carolina, “To the Editor,” Columbia Telescope, reprinted in Winyaw Intelligencer, 6 February 1830, p. 2.
¹⁵⁶ “Convention,” Southern Times and State Gazette, 12 August 1830, p. 2; “The Present Crisis,” Greenville Mountaineer, 21 May 1830, p. 2; Greenville Mountaineer, 23 July 1830, p. 2; Southern Times and State Gazette, 5 August 1830, p. 2; A Native Carolinian, “For the Courier,” Charleston Courier, 10 July 1830, p. 2; Father Paul, “For the Courier,” Charleston Courier, 10 July 1830, p. 2; Pendleton Messenger, 25 August 1830, p. 2; “Convention,” Camden Journal, 11 September 1830, p. 2; A Native of Chesterfield District, “To the People of South Carolina,” Charleston Courier, 7 September 1830, p. 2.
whether South Carolina should take action against it, the propriety of submitting the matter to a
convention of the people, and the ability of states to nullify or secede. Editors emphasized the
importance of this particular election and that the people needed to be well-informed about the
men for whom they were voting.157 As the candidates complied, their answers served as
additional fodder for convention debate, both in the press and political meetings.

The Pendleton Messenger reported tremendous excitement over the issue in the
upcountry, where the candidates universally opposed the American System but differed
regarding how the state should respond. In Pendleton, most candidates supported referring the
issue to a convention, though they generally hoped the result would not be disunion. Those in
Edgefield all supported the call of a convention but differed as to the ultimate course the
convention should pursue. Abbeville candidates were split on the issue of a convention,
although a Greenville Mountaineer writer named “Union” proclaimed so many of them to be in
favor that it was clear the “Nullifiers have commenced their work.” The Messenger’s editor
proclaimed the Abbeville, Pendleton, and Edgefield candidates to generally reflect the
sentiments of their potential constituents, but such was not the case in Greenville. Citizens there
so echoed their Mountaineer’s feelings against a convention that several legislative candidates
who voiced opinions in favor of one were forced to withdraw from the race.158

Greenville and other communities throughout the state made their anti-convention stance
clear in political meetings during the month leading up to the election. In addition to expressing
their views in speeches, the citizens at these gatherings passed resolutions opposing the

157 Greenville Mountaineer, 23 July 1830, p. 2, 30 July 1830, p. 3; Pendleton Messenger, 28 July 1830, p.
2; Camden Journal, 7 August 1830, p. 2; Southern Times and State Gazette, 9 August 1830, p. 2.
158 Pendleton Messenger, 11 August 1830, p. 2, 18 August 1830, p. 2; John Maxwell, “To the Electors of
the Pendleton District,” Pendleton Messenger, 11 August 1830, p. 3; Bailey Barton, “To the Voters of Pendleton
District,” Pendleton Messenger, 18 August 1830, p. 3; Union, “Nullification,” Greenville Mountaineer, 30 July
1830, p. 1; Edgefield Carolinian, reprinted in Charleston Mercury, 13 August 1830, p. 2; “Politics of Greenville,”
Greenville Mountaineer, 6 August 1830, p. 2; Greenville Mountaineer, 20 August 1830, p. 2; “The Non Convention
Party,” Greenville Mountaineer, 6 August 1830, p. 2.
convention and announcing which candidates best represented their views. The Mountaineer reported one such meeting in the upcountry town of Laurens, at which attendees spoke out against pro-convention forces that were “deaf to every voice of reason.” They resolved that South Carolina should not call her own convention but should pursue “a temperate, firm and unwavering opposition to the Tariff...in concert with the rest of the Southern states,” rather than taking rash action on her own that inevitably would lead to her downfall. Meetings in the coastal cities of Charleston and Beaufort and the mid-state town of Sumter similarly lambasted the pro-convention party for threatening the Union and generating unwarranted excitement among the state’s people. They called for a moderate approach, using constitutional means to resist the tariff. Some citizens in Edgefield resolved to instruct the legislature to limit any convention it may call to the purpose of sending another remonstrance to Congress. An unlimited convention, they declared, would result in “nothing but disunion, united with civil war, misery and death!”

Meetings also took place statewide in which citizens presented speeches and passed resolutions in favor of a convention and supporting candidates sympathetic to their cause. Speakers at two such meetings in the upcountry towns of Lancaster and Pickens claimed that a convention was the only alternative left to alleviate the burdens borne by the state and its people. The coastal city of Georgetown resolved that through a convention, the people of South Carolina “in their sovereign capacity” could take the necessary actions to effect relief. In the state capital, more than 2,000 men gathered and passed nearly unanimously a resolution supporting the call for a convention. Although the Charleston Mercury’s editor lamented that his own city had

159 Greenville Mountaineer, 24 September 1830, p. 2; “Meeting of Citizens,” Charleston Courier, 30 August 1830, p. 2; “To the Editor of the Mercury,” Charleston Mercury, 13 September 1830, p. 2; “Edgefield,” Southern Times and State Gazette, 9 September 1830, p. 3; Charleston Courier, 28 September 1830, p. 2; emphasis in original.
abandoned the proper course, he declared that “the flood of light that will be poured out from the centre of the State cannot fail to reach and illumine every corner of it.”

Charleston’s pro-convention faction faced greater difficulties than a definitively anti-convention meeting. The convention controversy spilled over into the September 1830 election for Charleston city intendant (equivalent to mayor), which pitted the incumbent, Charleston Mercury editor and nullification leader Henry L. Pinckney, against James Pringle, the customs collector for the Port of Charleston. Leading up to the polling date, writers in the Charleston Courier promoted Pringle and aimed to convince readers of Pinckney’s goals “to separate Carolina from the Union, and bring upon her disgrace and ruin.” Meanwhile, writers in the Mercury accused Pringle’s supporters of aiming to put down Pinckney because they saw him as too zealous. Pringle’s party aimed to defeat the incumbent “by endeavoring, fellow citizens, to excite your apprehensions, by raising cries of Disunion and Rebellion and War and Bloodshed.”

A record number of voters selected Pringle, drawing cheers from the anti-convention Greenville Mountaineer. The Southern Times and State Gazette, on the other hand, mourned the loss of Charleston and labeled Pringle’s victory as ominous due to his position as collector of tariffs.

Commentary throughout the state after Charleston’s city election noted the breaking down of old parties and the formation of new ones. The Charleston Courier thanked the level-headed press of the state for working to convince people that South Carolina had suffered no more than any other state, “thus escaping the delusion that allowed the [nullification] party’s former success and exposing the party’s treasonous designs.” Consequently, “the honest men of

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160 Charleston Courier, 28 September 1830, p. 2; Lancaster Beacon, reprinted in the Pendleton Messenger, 6 October 1830, p. 2; “Good News from Lancaster,” Southern Times and State Gazette, 27 September 1830, p. 2; Pendleton Messenger, 15 September 1830, p. 3; Winyaw Intelligencer, 1 September 1830, p. 2; Charleston Mercury, 13 September 1830, p. 2; “Great State Rights Meeting at Columbia,” Charleston Mercury, 24 September 1830, p. 2.

all parties of the state” joined together in “a new great party to overthrow the Nullifiers.” In a report on a rally following the election, the *Mercury* noted that the new party had formed when timid members of the State Rights Party defected over the issues of state sovereignty and convention, which allowed the formerly weak Clay camp to draw new allies from their ranks. The *Mercury* encouraged convention supporters to persevere despite the defeat and make it obvious via the legislative election that Charleston still sympathized with the rest of the State.162

Perhaps sensing their cause slipping away, pro-convention writers throughout the state engaged in what appeared to be a frantic last-ditch effort to sway voters on the eve of the election. A correspondent with the pseudonym “Hampden” addressed the anti-convention readers of the *Greenville Mountaineer* with a plea not to submit patiently and quietly while the rights of the state were trampled. He called for voters to “ignore the demagogues who would frighten you into support of themselves or friends by the cry of disunion and civil war.” The *Pendleton Messenger*’s editor similarly insisted that many men who were interested in continuing the American System had preyed upon the fears of the state’s patriotic citizens to convince them of the dangers of a convention. He labeled those fears absurd and declared that the legislature had gone as far as it could; the people needed to take the next step. An editorial in the *Charleston Mercury* asked voters to stand firmly and united in support of not only the state’s rights but also the Constitution and Union. If they did not, the *Southern Times and State Gazette* warned, “then may the people of the South look at once to the means of wearing their chains in the most comfortable manner—then may they prepare to yield every right which is worth invading.” The Columbia editor sought to stir readers’ patriotism by reminding them that brave men from Boston to Savannah had rallied when cries of oppression rang out in 1775. It should be

even easier for South Carolinians to do so now, because there was no call to arms but to “a peaceful method of resistance.” He asked, “Shall we refuse to do our duty, until the hour of actual conflict comes?”

During the middle weeks of October, each newspaper contained results from their own and other districts as they trickled in. Although some districts elected a full convention or non-convention ticket, most districts sent representatives from both parties to the capital. Contrary to indications prior to the election, the anti-conventioners carried Columbia, whereas the pro-convention men took Charleston. In the end, the convention party controlled the legislature (even electing the Mercury’s Pinckney as Speaker of the House), but their numbers did not form a constitutional majority, and the convention issue failed.

This marked the end of the controversy for the Greenville Mountaineer’s editor, who declared the excitement which “the great question” produced was dying away, “and minds of our readers are now prepared to receive other food.” Other editors, however, announced plans to remain vigilant to the anti-tariff cause. Although fewer than 50 out of 800 voters had gone for the convention ticket in Camden, the Journal’s editor noted that not one submission man could be found in that district. He called for the state legislature to give Congress another solemn warning that the time was fast approaching when its current system of national legislation would be looked upon as insupportable. He believed that reason and sound feeling would march through the next session of Congress, and the state’s worries would be at an end.

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163 Hampden, “For the Mountaineer,” Greenville Mountaineer, 8 October 1830, p. 2; Pendleton Messenger, 6 October 1830, p. 2; “To the State Rights and Jackson Party,” Charleston Mercury, 12 October 1830, p. 2; “The Election,” Southern Times and State Gazette, 4 October 1830, p. 3; emphasis in original.
164 Pendleton Messenger, 14 October 1830, p. 2, 20 October 1830, p. 2; Greenville Mountaineer, 15 October 1830, p. 2, 22 October 1830, p. 2; Southern Times and State Gazette, 18 October 1830, p. 2; “The Election,” Charleston Mercury, 15 October 1830, p. 2; Charleston Mercury, 28 October 1830, p. 2.
165 Greenville Mountaineer, 22 October 1830, p. 2; Camden Journal, reprinted in the Pendleton Messenger, 20 October 1830, p. 2; Camden Journal, reprinted in the Southern Times and State Gazette, 21 October 1830, p. 3.
State Rights editors were not so optimistic about the government relieving the state of her burdens, but they were pleased with the numbers they had gained in the state legislature. Editorials in the *Southern Times and State Gazette* and the *Winyaw Intelligencer* cited not only Pinckney’s election as speaker, but also the legislature’s passage of a resolution recognizing the right of the state to interpose and arrest the usurpations of the federal government as evidence that the State Rights Party triumphantly had sustained its principles. The *Intelligencer* avowed that the state would maintain those political doctrines, “which are considered to be as expedient in securing the integrity of the ‘Union,’ as they will be effectual in protecting the ‘States’ in the enjoyment of their just and equal rights.” Furthermore, the *Times and Gazette* predicted that the elaborate discussion of the fundamental principles of government undertaken over the course of the year would leave an impression in the people’s minds, forming “a new era in the constitutional history of this country.”

Editorials and letters appearing in South Carolina’s newspapers throughout the year following the Exposition and Protest indicated that writers throughout the state found the tariffs and internal improvements unjust and unconstitutional. They disagreed, however, as to whether nullification was the appropriate mode of redress. Disagreement heightened as the first session of the 21st Congress progressed, and many editors saw no hope of relief from the oppressive system. Although some preached continued forbearance and patience in wake of tariff reductions and the Maysville Road veto, others saw those actions as proof that the American System would be fixed upon South Carolina forever if she did not resist. Proposed anti-slavery bills increased their resolve.

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The Webster-Hayne debates surrounding the Foot resolution instigated discussion among South Carolina’s writers about whether the state had the authority to void offending laws of Congress, and a sect fiercely loyal to the Union arose in the wake of rampant nullification and disunion talk. Sensing the unpopularity of their ideas during these debates, nullification proponents turned their attention toward advocating the call of a convention of South Carolina’s citizens to decide upon the best course. Although the Nullifiers believed a convention would be more palatable to the Unionist faction, opponents saw the convention as thinly veiled nullification doctrines. The debate over nullification/convention versus patient forbearance reached fever pitch as candidates stumped for state legislative offices. Each side accused the other of raising disunion excitement within the state and insisted its own method of redress was the only peaceable option. Meanwhile, the State Rights Party fractured over the issues of state sovereignty and convention, and a new party developed that encompassed the more conservative State Rights men as well as moderates and conservatives from other parties.

This split, which set up the ultimate battle for state and local elections in the fall, proved to be an important turning point. From the summer of 1828 until the 1830 fall elections, editorials could be categorized into three camps: those who saw the rights of the state as paramount and sought to protect them, even if it meant rebelling against the federal government; those who aimed to preserve the Union above all, even at risk of subjecting the state to measures they admitted were unjust; and those who upheld the state’s rights and Union equally, urging a moderate course until federal usurpations became so intolerable as to warrant drastic action. A study of the newspapers during the spring and summer of 1830 demonstrates a melding of the latter two camps, coinciding with the development of the state’s new political party.
The new party not only sealed the victory of tariff collector Pringle over the nullifier Pinckney for the office of Charleston city intendant, but it likely also played a role in the outcome of the election for state legislators in districts throughout the state. In the newspapers as in the political arena, the goal of the combined moderate and conservative forces appeared to be quieting the radicals. Although the nullification papers tried their best throughout the campaign season to emphasize that their proposed modes of redress were peaceful, the damage already was done. If the words published in moderate newspapers such as the *Charleston Courier*, *Greenville Mountaineer* and *Camden Journal* are any indication, forceful language in nullification prints like the *Southern Times* and *Charleston Mercury* likely struck fear into the hearts of the people. In some, they provoked alarm of the national government assuming unlimited control, just as they clearly had hoped. In others, however, they instigated panic that war and bloodshed were forthcoming. Moderate papers helped fuel that terror, to the point of winning Charleston votes for a man who enforced the very laws that the people had been disputing.

The State Rights Party’s assumption that the new party saw Pinckney as overzealous was true, and editorials in newspapers statewide advanced the same claim regarding State Rights candidates for legislature. The *Camden Journal*—which in the previous year had proclaimed the tariffs to be the possible end of the Union—called the toasts at a pro-convention dinner “rather too bellicose for our taste,” and an editorial in the *Edgefield Carolinian* declared that South Carolinians would rather see her rights restored by her juries than her men of war. A correspondent told the *Charleston Courier*’s readers that the people had become frightened by the revolutionaries and begun to speak out in “a milder tone of language in reference to grievances and oppression.” He proclaimed, “The work of political redemption has begun,” and
encouraged voters to select representatives devoted to preserving the Union. A writer from Greenville similarly told voters to keep the hot-headed politicians at home and send men to Columbia who would pursue a gentlemanly course.167

Although the nullification implications of a convention and the overzealous language of some of its supporters may have kept the State Rights Party from achieving the constitutional majority required to call a convention, they still convinced enough voters of the dangers of federalism that they took control of the state legislature and subsequently elected one of their most outspoken leaders as Speaker of the House. Their influence would continue to grow over the next two years, as would their conflict with those who held the Union in higher esteem.

167 Camden Journal, 28 August 1830, p. 2; Edgefield Carolinian, quoted in Camden Journal, 4 September 1830, p. 2; A Native Carolinian, “For the Courier,” Charleston Courier, 10 July 1830, p. 2; Greenville, “A Voice from the Mountains,” Charleston Courier, 20 August 1830, p. 2.
5. THE RISE OF CALHOUN AND THE BUILDING OF NULLIFICATION POWER

Opponents of a convention during the fall of 1830 argued that Congress already had demonstrated a willingness to reduce tariffs passed in 1828, and that if South Carolinians would have just a little more patience, the system would fall altogether. When the 21st Congress showed no such inclination during its second session (in the winter and spring of 1831), adherents to the doctrine of nullification insisted that the people’s patience had run out and the state must take action.

Newspapers on both sides of the nullification issue complained that as soon as resolutions recommending modification of tariffs were proposed, a majority of Congress voted to table them without debate. The editor of the Pendleton Messenger noted as the session began that everyone, Nullifiers included, held out hope for Congress to do the right thing, but that such hope was dim. “The refusal even to consider the propriety of reducing some of the duties, as recently proposed, shews [sic] very clearly the dispositions of that body on the subject,” he proclaimed. An editorial in the Charleston Mercury called the Tariff Party in Congress “firm and immoveable” and declared the tariffs of protection “so much the settled policy of the country as to be no longer open to discussion.” The Mercury’s editor accused Congress of an “outrageous disregard of the complaints of the people.” He proclaimed that the only difference between the tariff situation and that which started the Revolutionary War was that the latter was taxation without representation, whereas the former was taxation against representation. Even the anti-nullification Greenville Mountaineer balked at Congress’s refusal to consider the tariff question. Its editor hoped, for the
“interest of South Carolina” and the “safety and permanency of this Union,” that more successful efforts would be made to call up the question.\textsuperscript{168}

Yet the nullification papers continued to protest when Congress agreed to consider a resolution proposed by Charles Haynes of Georgia to reduce the duty on imported sugar. According to the \textit{Mercury}, that Congress would consider reducing the duty on sugar and not other items proved that the tariff men wished only to remove duties on the articles which they needed and did not manufacture themselves. The editor of the \textit{Southern Times and State Gazette} (in Columbia) concurred that self-interest constituted “the sole fulcrum of all the movements of the Federal-Tariff-nonslaveholding consolidation party.” He maintained that they would not repeal or modify duties but for their own benefit and could never be expected to think of doing justice to the South until it was profitable for them. The \textit{Pendleton Messenger} contained similar arguments until the sugar bill failed. Then its editor noted that although its defeat proved the tariff party’s resolve to keep the protective system intact, southerners could be somewhat cheered in the knowledge that their sugar-producing kin in Louisiana reaped some benefit from the duty.\textsuperscript{169}

Not only did Congress fail to reduce any tariffs during the 1831 session, but it also attempted to restore the duty on salt reduced during the previous session. Although the bill proposed by Committee on Manufactures Chairman Rollin Mallary failed, it ruffled the feathers of nullification editors who saw the measure as proof that the tariff party never would relieve the South of its oppressions. An editorial in the \textit{Southern Times and State Gazette} railed against the tariff men, whom the editor perceived as “assuming a menacing attitude.” He told the South


Carolinians who preached forbearance that the time had come to decide between final submission to a permanent tariff policy and uncompromising resistance to it. The *Charleston Mercury* addressed the Congressmen who saw the original reduction as proof that the protective system would fall, chastising them for giving their constituents false hope and forcing them to endure their chains. Like his Columbia brother, the Charleston editor told the people that the time had come to throw off their yoke and seek redress.\(^{170}\)

Whereas the *Charleston Courier* insisted that Congress did not reduce the tariffs during its session because of the time consumed by other matters, other editors in the state agreed with the *Times & Gazette* and the *Mercury* that the session proved a majority of Congress would prevent any sort of relief at the national level; the time had come for the state to act. An editorial in the newly established *Camden and Lancaster Beacon* summarizing the Congressional session noted that the tariff still existed as “the same horrid monstrosity of ’28,” and that the anti-nullification camp surely must be convinced that “not justice, nor ingenuity, nor love of Union and harmony, have exerted a salutary influence upon Congress.” The *Pendleton Messenger* referred to a resolution adopted by the state legislature at the end of 1830 which declared that “whenever a state which is suffering under unconstitutional oppression ‘shall lose hope of redress from the wisdom and justice of the Federal Government, it will be its right and duty to interpose in its sovereign capacity for the purpose of arresting the progress of evil occasioned by the said unconstitutional acts.’” According to the *Messenger*, all hope was gone. Its editor asserted that “there are limits beyond which patience ceases to be a virtue.”\(^{171}\)


\(^{171}\) “Extract of a letter from Washington, received yesterday,” *Charleston Courier*, 9 March 1831, p. 2; *Camden and Lancaster Beacon*, 12 April 1831, p. 3; *Pendleton Messenger*, 9 March 1831, p. 2, 23 March 1831, p. 2, 23 November 1831, p. 2; emphasis in original.
Other elements of the American System fueled the Nullifiers during the Congressional session. The *Southern Times and State Gazette* could agree with the *Charleston Courier* on one point: legislators certainly had been busy with a number of items other than the tariff.

Unfortunately, the Columbia editor asserted, that “endless multiplicity” of items proved more and more that the federal government aimed to gain power beyond what the Constitution allowed. Among those items was a pension bill, which the *Times & Gazette* proclaimed would result in exorbitant annual payments—mainly to men in the middle and northern states—leaving no hope of paying off the national debt or reducing the tariff. Several other items appropriated for internal improvements, and still others sought to establish branches of the U.S. Bank within the states. The national bank became a particularly sore subject among South Carolina editors, not only because it attempted to force branches upon states that did not want them, but also because it provided multi-million-dollar loans for internal improvements in the tariff states. The anti-nullification *Greenville Mountaineer* lumped the tariffs, internal improvements, and the bank together as one odious, unconstitutional system and proclaimed to be “whole-hog” against it. Similarly, the *Camden and Lancaster Beacon* attributed to the systemizers “a National Bank—a National system of Internal Improvements—a National debt—a National system of lavish expenditure—a National system of exorbitant Tariff—a National Supreme Judiciary,—the whole calculated to end in a National Consolidation, and a National Monarchy!”

**Arguments For and Against Nullification**

Thus the editors in favor of resistance began to portray the conflict strictly as one between Federalists and “True Republicans,” and they frequently appealed to the people’s

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172 *Southern Times and State Gazette*, 6 January 1831, p. 2, 5 February 1831, p. 3; “Pension Bill—Revolutionary Army,” *Southern Times and State Gazette*, 5 March 1831, p. 3; “United States Bank,” *Southern Times and State Gazette*, 26 February 1831, p. 2; *Greenville Mountaineer*, 27 August 1831, p. 2; *Camden and Lancaster Beacon*, 10 May 1831, p. 3; emphasis in original. See also *Charleston Mercury*, 2 March 1831, p. 3.
reverence for the patriarchs of the Republican Party in their arguments for nullification. They cited the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of ’98 and ’99—in addition to other writings by their authors, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson—as the sources of those Republican principles as well as the nullification doctrine. Nullifiers particularly adhered to Jefferson’s notions that the states have reserved rights, one of which is to “peacefully to interpose a protective remedy against the oppressive unconstitutional acts of the Federal Government.” The editor of the *Camden and Lancaster Beacon* insisted that this was not the doctrine of anarchy or civil war but “the main-spring of our peculiar political machinery. It is the very principle of order and harmony in our political system—the balance of antagonist powers.” Nullification editors asked if those who execrated the Nullifiers for their beliefs would dare to attack the venerated authors of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, and if not, why would they assail the “political descendents” of Madison and Jefferson?¹⁷³

Nullification papers also appealed to the spirit of ’76. According to an editorial in the *Southern Times and State Gazette*, no descendents of Tories could be found in the nullification ranks—only Patriots. “The love of liberty; the inextinguishable hatred of tyranny and tyrants, the high unbending spirit of resistance to oppression in every form, is bequeathed from sire to son,” the Columbia editor proclaimed. In addition, nullification editors declared that a number of Revolutionary War veterans themselves supported their cause. Numerous speeches, letters, and quotations from veterans published in the nullification papers vilified the Federalist party, glorified the founding fathers, and expressed that if Carolinians did not resist federal usurpations to preserve the Constitution, their fighting would have been in vain. The Nullifiers made a

mascot of Gen. Thomas Sumter, the “Gamecock warrior” famous for driving Lord Charles Cornwallis out of the Carolinas during the Revolution. Editors gloated that Sumter was among their doctrine’s most ardent supporters and proclaimed him still to be “vigorously in the maintenance of the principles for which, fifty years ago, he fought and bled.” The editor of the *Camden and Lancaster Beacon* pointed out that Sumter not only fought on the battlefields of the Revolution, but he also had, as a Congressman for South Carolina in ’98, fought “shoulder to shoulder with Jefferson” and “hurled from the seats of power the friends of federalism and consolidation and disunion, as the republicans of this day must do.” Similarly, the *Southern Times and State Rights Gazette* proclaimed the Whigs of the Revolution, the Republicans of ’98 and ’99, and the State Rights Party of ’31 to be of the same ilk, struggling for the same free principles against usurpation.\(^{174}\)

A third argument the nullification papers used to persuade readers toward their doctrines was that other states had exercised that right throughout the nation’s history; they just did not necessarily use the word “nullification” to describe their actions. Virginia had set the precedent in 1798 by declaring the Alien and Sedition Laws unconstitutional and void within her borders. Massachusetts and Connecticut used Virginia’s earlier actions as justification when they objected to Federalist policies during the War of 1812. More recently, Georgia had denied the authority of the Supreme Court in the murder case of Cherokee George Corn Tassels, and Alabama had defied the U.S. Bank by refuting its right to establish a branch within her limits. The editors

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\(^{174}\) *Pendleton Messenger*, 14 September 1831, p. 2, 19 October 1831, p. 3; Thomas Sumter, *Pendleton Messenger*, 23 November 1831, p. 2; *Camden and Lancaster Beacon*, 6 September 1831, p. 2; *Southern Times and State Gazette*, 22 January 1831, p. 2, 23 April 1831, p. 3; emphasis in original.
noted that none of these acts of nullification had resulted in bloodshed or disruption of the Union.\(^{175}\)

While the nullification papers grew more numerous and advanced ever stronger and more cohesive arguments for nullification, the anti-nullification papers weakly attempted to refute the claims of the Nullifiers while recycling contentions that nullification would lead to disunion and that the tariff was not bad enough to warrant that. The *Greenville Mountaineer* and *Charleston Courier* both denied that anything in the Constitution or the writings of Madison and Jefferson gave the states veto power over actions of the federal government. One writer for the *Courier* asserted that the Nullifiers misunderstood the Virginia Resolution as well as the Constitution, particularly the powers vested in Congress and the Supreme Court. Another noted that whereas some revered founding fathers may have supported the rights of the states above the nation, others—including Benjamin Franklin—thought it just and necessary to waive individual considerations for the general welfare. The editor of the *Mountaineer* questioned not only the Republican foundations of the nullification doctrine, but also its similarities to the issues at the heart of the Revolution. He noted that the patriots of old complained of grievances imposed by a foreign government in which the colonies were unrepresented and had no agency in forming. Furthermore, he argued that no Revolutionary soldier could be for nullification, quoting one who had said, “I have fought too hard, and suffered too much for my country, to see her government put in jeopardy.” The *Mountaineer*’s chief specifically denied Gen. Sumter’s support of the doctrine, claiming—despite evidence to the contrary in the general’s own writings—that Sumter

\(^{175}\) *Southern Times and State Gazette*, 23 February 1831, p. 3, 9 April 1831, p. 3; *Charleston Mercury*, 4 February 1831, p. 2; *Camden and Lancaster Beacon*, 22 March 1831, p. 3.
regarded nullification “with great horror” and was unwilling to endanger the Union of the states “for which he fought so gallantly.”  

Anti-nullification papers thought it “idle and nonsensical” to talk about nullifying an act of Congress yet remaining a member of the federal government. The true question was revolution or submission: was it preferable to bear with the tariff or dissolve the Union? Although the editor of the *Mountaineer* clearly was against the American System, he and his counterpart at the *Charleston Courier* continued denying that the tariff was any worse than other acts the state had borne without revolting, and they declared the people already had asserted, in the last legislative election, that they would rather contend with the tariff than whatever evils nullification might bring.  

**Political Intrigue and the Rise of Calhoun**

As the Nullification Party gained momentum, its newspapers rallied behind a leader in whom they saw all the qualities that made the Whigs of the Revolution and the Republicans of the 1790s great men. By 1831, it had become well-known that Vice President John C. Calhoun, a native Carolinian, had drafted the *Exposition and Protest* expressing the state’s right to nullify unconstitutional laws within her borders. When President Andrew Jackson turned out not to be the savior the anti-tariff ranks expected him to be, those in the Free Trade camp (the unqualified resistance men of the former State Rights Party) turned to Calhoun.

A controversy between Calhoun and Jackson that was publicized during the winter of 1831 served to further hamper Jackson’s popularity in South Carolina while strengthening the

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nullification papers’ admiration for Calhoun. William H. Crawford, a former cabinet officer and Minister to France, alleged that twelve years earlier, Calhoun as Secretary of War had recommended that Jackson be reprimanded for his actions as a general in the Seminole War. Jackson wrote to Calhoun expressing surprise at this revelation and accusing Calhoun of duplicity. Calhoun responded with documentation proving that Jackson’s orders did not authorize him to occupy St. Mark’s and Pensacola and that Jackson had been made aware of the cabinet’s decision in that regard. Therefore, Calhoun asserted, there had been no duplicity. Jackson’s reply insisted that the new information was the first he had heard that Calhoun was not fully behind his actions, and whereas he previously had considered Calhoun a sincere friend, he now stated in the words of Caesar, *Et tu, Brute?* Jackson declared the correspondence ended, but Calhoun issued one final letter questioning why Jackson dredged up this issue so long past and speculating on secret political machinations against him. Although the conflict took place in May of 1830, the public did not become aware of it until early 1831, when Calhoun published the correspondence, along with voluminous supporting documentation in pamphlet form for the purpose of exposing what he considered to be a plot to destroy his political career.\(^{178}\)

The nullification newspapers declared Calhoun fully vindicated by the pamphlet and proclaimed the plot to destroy his career a failure. They also reported festivities throughout the state that demonstrated reverence for Calhoun. In the upcountry, a dinner sponsored in part by the *Pendleton Messenger’s* editor celebrated the exoneration of Calhoun’s character and included toasts not only to the man of honor, but also to the Revolutionary and Republican heroes who “elevated the character of the nation and preserved the rights of man.” A State Rights ball in Charleston featured Calhoun’s name emblazoned on a banner beside that of Thomas Jefferson.

Noting the banner, the *Charleston Mercury* described Calhoun as “a Patriot, whose spotless reputation calumny has indeed attempted, but cannot taint—who is even now triumphantly treading under foot the despicable snares which were laid for his destruction, and who is yet destined to attain an eminence from which he will look down with pity on the impotent edifice of his enemies.”

Still clinging to some respect for Jackson, the *Pendleton Messenger*’s editor refused to comment on his conduct in the controversy, telling readers to judge for themselves. The chief of the *Southern Times and State Rights Gazette*, on the other hand, lashed out at Jackson for “allowing the fraud to take place.” He declared, “The stern honesty of General Jackson’s character, gave the hope that he would sweep the filthy webs of envenomed and crawling artificers from the walls of the national mansion—but circumstances have proven that his inexperience and want of suspicion have rendered him too often their victim himself.” The Columbia editor blamed Secretary of State Martin Van Buren for the whole affair, accusing him of using Crawford as his tool.

Accusations against Van Buren grew after the mass resignation of Jackson’s cabinet. The *Times & Gazette*’s editor declared the people to be “fixed in the persuasion that Mr. Van Buren’s whole machinery consists of a series of unprincipled intrigues, having in view no other purpose than his own aggrandisement [sic].” He and the *Messenger*’s editor proclaimed that Van Buren and his crony John Henry Eaton, Secretary of War, were crushed by public opinion in the wake of their failed attempt to bring down Calhoun. Editorials in the *Camden and Lancaster Beacon*
and Greenville Mountaineer added that Van Buren and Eaton had damaged Jackson’s reputation, and that Jackson needed to distance himself from them if he was to have any chance at re-election. The Messenger’s only explanation for the rest of the resignations was that Jackson wished to be rid of the cabinet members who approved of Calhoun’s conduct in the “late correspondence.”

In the wake of the controversy, newspaper columns filled with speculations about how it would affect the 1832 presidential election. The consensus of both the nullification and anti-nullification papers was that the matter potentially hurt Jackson’s chances for re-election. The Camden and Lancaster Beacon posited that Jackson had “become clay in the dexterous hands of the New York potter [Van Buren], who has been molding him and his messages to suit his own selfish purposes, instead of the honor and interest of the country.” He and the Messenger’s editor claimed it was because of Van Buren that Jackson had pursued the wrong course in terms of internal improvements, the tariff, surplus revenue, and the national bank. Editorials in the Times & Gazette expressed similar notions, including one that proclaimed influences to be at work to wean Jackson from his southern friends and thrust him “into the support of interests as deeply at war with ours, as with the principles of our Government.” The Beacon chief presumed that Van Buren aimed to succeed Calhoun as vice president and hoped that the rift between Calhoun and Jackson could be repaired to avoid that calamity. He declared that if Van Buren were to run on Jackson’s ticket, South Carolinians would have to break with Jackson or “sit quietly down and see all the power and patronage of the government pass by them into a channel from which it may never—never be recovered.” The Charleston Mercury added that Van Buren and his editors made sure the split was irreversible by “holding the most opprobrious language to the friends of

181 “Changes, and Rumors of Changes,” Southern Times and State Gazette, 30 April 1831, p. 3; “The Cabinet,” Southern Times and State Gazette, 7 May 1831, p. 2; Greenville Mountaineer, 14 May 1831, p. 2; Camden and Lancaster Beacon, 3 May 1831, p. 3; Pendleton Messenger, 4 May 1831, p. 2, 11 May 1831, p. 3.
Mr. Calhoun,” and that as Van Buren forced the friends of Calhoun to oppose Jackson, the Clay camp was attempting to entice them into alliance. Editorials in the *Mercury* and the *Beacon* avowed that the Calhounites never would support Clay over Jackson; thus, the entire controversy had created a difficult quandary for the Free Trade men.¹⁸²

**Jackson’s Letter and the War between Parties in Charleston**

The Free Trade Party’s dilemma intensified when President Jackson issued a letter rebuking them. This new controversy began when the Union Party of Charleston made plans to organize its own Independence Day celebration, excluding the Nullifiers in that city.

Charleston’s Free Trade men responded with a meeting to determine whether they should have their own celebration. They decided that they must, lest the people think them unwilling to celebrate the event “which laid the foundations of that liberty, which was consecrated by the best blood of our fathers, and is endeared to the hearts of Carolinians,” but the Nullifiers lamented that all the men of the city could not celebrate the day together. Charleston’s most outspoken nullification paper, the *Mercury*, blasted the Unionists for tarnishing a day that “should be devoted to peace and harmony, and to a general and indiscriminate celebration of the virtues and achievements of our ancestors” with what the editor perceived to be a scheme to “revive party excitement, to organize party power, and, if possible, to obtain and secure party ascendancy and domination.” Other nullification papers in the state chastised the Union Party for instigating a

partisan breach on the most sacred of patriotic holidays and noted that nothing could be more symptomatic of an unhappy Union.183

Writers in the Courier replied that their separate celebration was not intended to disturb the harmony of the community, but to preserve it. A correspondent under the name of “Seventy-Six” claimed that members of the Union Party, following the “violence” of the prior Independence Day, vowed never again to be put in a position where “their ears were to be assailed with the discordant notes of Disunion and Nullification.” Another called “The Cow-Pens” declared the community to be tired of the agitation produced by the “dangerous and ruinous schemes of the Nullifiers.” This writer asserted that it was the Free Trade Party, not the Unionists, who were disturbing the tranquility of the community with its Independence Day preparations. Whereas the Union men were planning a plain and simple event appropriate to honor the day, Cow-Pens accused the Nullifiers of using “ridiculous show and pageantry” to corrupt the youth of Charleston, seduce them to “the orgies of the self styled State Rights party,” and ultimately train them to revolution and bloodshed.184

The Courier published the proceedings of its “plain and simple” celebration, noting that although nearly the whole male population of the city had ventured out for the two parties, only those “masses of citizens, friendly to, and determined to preserve the Union” moved to the place designated for the assembly of the Union Party. Toasts given at the Union celebration all pointed to preservation of the Union. Some celebrated the various branches of the federal government, including Congress and the judiciary. One toast proclaimed that if one state had a right to change the government, the others had an equal right to prevent it. Another lumped together

183 “State Rights and Free Trade Party,” Charleston Mercury, 6 June 1831, p.2; Charleston Mercury, 1 June 1831, p. 2; Camden and Lancaster Beacon, 14 June 1831, p. 3, 28 June 1831, p. 2; Pendleton Messenger, 8 June 1831, p. 2.
nullification, secession, and “putting the State upon its sovereignty” as “Revolution in disguise.” The Courier’s Unionist counterpart in the upcountry penned new editorials boasting the admirable nature of the toasts and speeches at Charleston’s anti-nullification party as each oration found its way into his hands. The whole proceeding apparently breathed the Greenville Mountaineer’s sentiments “precisely on this interesting question.”

Likewise, proceedings of the Free Trade dinner met with high praise in the editorial columns of the state’s nullification newspapers. Toasts celebrated not only the Revolutionary heroes, but also the Constitution, the state of South Carolina, and the freedom and sovereignty of the states from both foreign domination and federal usurpation. Many of them advocated nullification as an appropriate remedy for the latter. The Camden and Lancaster Beacon called the Free Trade July 4th celebration triumphant “over the amalgamated influence which was opposed to them, on an occasion which, though heretofore devoted exclusively to a commemoration of the principles of ’76, the Union party had outraged by the indulgence of a petty animosity.” The Beacon chief believed the sentiments in the toasts and speeches to be worthy of the anniversary of independence as well as the “later proud era of ’98.” He declared, “They prove that neither inglorious defection within, nor idle threats from without, can discourage them in their determination to preserve LIBERTY---THE CONSTITUTION---UNION!”

Controversy over the separate Independence Day celebrations continued well beyond the Fourth of July, after correspondence between President Jackson and the Union Party came to light. The Unionists penned a letter inviting Jackson to their celebration, calling it an event of

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185 “Celebration of the Fifty-fifth Anniversary of American Independence in Charleston,” Charleston Courier, 6 July 1831, p. 2; Greenville Mountaineer, 16 July 1831, p. 2; Greenville Mountaineer, 30 July 1831, p. 2; Greenville Mountaineer, 20 August 1831, p. 2.
186 Pendleton Messenger, 20 July 1831, p. 2; Camden and Lancaster Beacon, 19 July 1831, p. 3; emphasis in original.
more than ordinary import. They explained that the party distinctions in the state were “portentous omens” that threatened “civil convulsion.” The letter declared the Union Party’s aim to be reviving “in its full force, the benign spirit of Union,” and “to defend her institutions, and transmit them unimpaired to the generations that shall succeed us.” Though he declined the invitation, Jackson’s reply praised the Union party for cherishing a cordial, habitual, and immovable attachment to [the Union]; accustoming yourselves to think and speak of it as of the palladium of your political safety and prosperity, watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can, in any event, be abandoned; and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts.

He also commended their “Patriotic endeavors” to “lessen the violence of party dissention” by relying on the national councils for relief of oppression rather than unconstitutional means of redress.187

The Unionist editor of the Greenville Mountaineer wrote that he was proud of Jackson’s letter, which he proclaimed to have fully expressed the president’s sentiments on nullification and disunion. The pro-nullification Camden and Lancaster Beacon admitted that if the accusations against the Free Trade Party were true, Jackson’s response would have been appropriate: “He would be recreant to the dictates of patriotism, and forgetful of his ‘sacred duties’ were he to remain quietly indolent, when a faction had abrogated a LAW of Congress, and threatened to break up the Union into ‘dishonored fragments.’” Jackson had been deceived, however, as to the Free Trade Party’s objects. The editor regretted that men of the state had “added to the outrage which we have received from our northern oppressors,” and implored

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187 Union and State Rights Party Committee of Arrangements to President Andrew Jackson, 5 June 1831, and President Andrew Jackson to Union and State Rights Party Committee of Arrangements, 14 June 1831, in Charleston Mercury, 7 July 1831, p. 2.
Charleston’s Free Trade men to “repel the imputation, in the spirit which belongs to the occasion.”\textsuperscript{188}

The spirit invoked among Charleston’s Free Trade sect was one of anger. The \textit{Mercury}’s editor accused the “so-called Unionists” of preparing the way for the introduction of military force “by poisoning the mind of the President, not only against his old friends, but against as high minded, patriotic and devoted friends to the Union, as ever rallied around it in the hour of danger.” Rather than “submit in silence to the stigma groundlessly fixed upon them,” the Nullifiers called a meeting at which they passed resolutions declaring their patriotism and love of the Union, expressing disappointment that the president had allowed himself to be so deceived that he would turn against those who had so ardently supported him, and recriminating the Union party for instigating partisan violence. The \textit{Greenville Mountaineer} declared the whole affair “the commencement of serious difficulties between the two parties.”\textsuperscript{189}

\textbf{Free Trade Associations and the Charleston City Election}

Charleston’s Union men widened the partisan gap even further when they met to nominate the party’s own delegates to a Philadelphia Anti-Tariff Convention scheduled to begin on 30 September 1831. Union and Free Trade papers across the state unanimously expressed regret that the Union camp in Charleston had proceeded so hastily in appointing delegates, setting the precedent for each party to appoint its own, rather than the parties coming together to present a united front at so important a meeting. The editors feared that a squabbling delegation

\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Greenville Mountaineer}, 16 July 1831, p. 2; \textit{Camden and Lancaster Beacon}, 19 July 1831, p. 3; emphasis in original.

would weaken the state’s influence. Uniting would, according to the *Greenville Mountaineer*, strike terror into the minds of the opponents and “stir up new zeal in our own ranks.”\(^{190}\)

The whole matter created a new partisan zeal instead, particularly among the Nullifiers. The *Charleston Mercury* avowed that the duplicitous actions of the Union Party combined with “the extent to which South Carolina has been awed by the Presidential menace” had done more to produce unanimity among the Nullifiers “than any thing perhaps, which could possibly have been devised.” Meetings sprang up across the state where the supporters of nullification from each district nominated delegates to the Anti-Tariff Convention and passed resolutions denouncing the president’s language in his letter to the Union Party. Editorials discussing these meetings demonstrate that the nullification party had gained tremendous strength. After providing the resolutions passed at numerous gatherings over the course of several weeks in August and September, the *Pendleton Messenger*’s editor finally expressed regret that he could not publish all of the proceedings for want of room. He noted, however, that each one drew hundreds of citizens, and that Free Trade men outnumbered Unionists 10 to 1. The *Camden and Lancaster Beacon* announced that even districts which previously had refuted nullification had “let go of an unsound faith, for the saving principles of the Republican school” and embraced “the doctrine which is to lead poor, suffering Carolina in triumph over the partial legislation of Congress---the doctrine which alone can save our government from the besetting evil of Consolidation.”\(^{191}\)

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Many of the meetings resulted in the formation of Free Trade and State Rights Associations. Charleston’s Nullifiers created the first of these clubs, but a majority of the state’s districts followed suit, including the notoriously anti-nullification district of Greenville. Each of the associations drew up resolutions opposing the tariff, drawing on the language of James Madison and Thomas Jefferson to show their devotion to the Constitution, belief in a government of limited powers, and assertion that when the government exceeds its delegated powers, the states have a right to interpose for arresting the progress of evil and maintaining the rights afforded to them. Each association took as its charge “the dissemination of the doctrines contained in the Kentucky Resolutions of ’98-9 and the true principles of Free Trade,” so that the people could “form a correct opinion of questions under discussion, as well as a proper estimate of their rights.” Toward the end of the year, the Free Trade and State Rights Associations from the various districts met in Columbia to arrange for the printing and distribution of tracts containing information on their cause and to call a convention of association delegates in Charleston on Washington’s birthday the following February. The *Camden and Lancaster Beacon*’s editor refuted claims that the meeting was intended to upend the federal government, declaring that on the contrary, the group hoped to restore the government and Constitution to their former glory.¹⁹²

Nonetheless, the Unionist newspapers continued to pin revolutionary aims on the Free Trade Party, and the formation of Free Trade and State Rights Associations seemed to them just another tool for instigating disunion. Editorials in the *Greenville Mountaineer, Charleston Courier,* and *Camden Journal* even compared the associations to the Jacobin Clubs responsible

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for the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution. Although a few Unionist meetings sprinkled across the countryside passed resolutions opposing nullification and supporting Jackson, the Unionist newspapers noted rampant apathy among their ranks and lamented that the Nullifiers’ redoubled zeal had taken over nearly every corner of the state. Writers for the 
*Charleston Courier* pleaded with their fellow statesmen to shake off their indifference and “interpose all their energies between this community and the fearful abyss to which it is tending, to use every effort to resume the almost extinguished spirit of conciliation, to save us from that most awful of calamities, civil war.” The editor of the *Greenville Mountaineer*, awed that the Nullifiers had gained ascendancy even in his town, similarly noted that if the Unionists would not rise up to oppose the Nullifiers’ progress, “we may expect to be involved in the ruin which must inevitably attend its final success and triumph.”193

Unionists became particularly fearful of the Free Trade Party’s newfound strength as the Charleston city election approached. Again, as in the prior September, James Pringle and Henry Pinckney were on the ballot for the office of City Intendant. This time, however, the Unionist editors noted that the Nullifiers were doing all they could to gain votes for the city election while the Union men remained inert. Writers in the *Charleston Courier* proclaimed that the ballot box was the party’s only weapon and asserted that votes would decide “whether the broad Banner of our Union, with its Stripes and its Stars, shall continue to wave over South Carolina…or whether

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we shall be among the first to tear asunder its folds, erase its bright stars, and plant our solitary standard upon the desert of our faded glory.”

Contrary to the Unionists’ hopes but illustrative of the Free Trade Party’s dominance, not only did the nullifier Pinckney regain his intendant (mayoral) seat over the Unionist tariff collector Pringle, but the Nullifiers elected the warden for every ward of Charleston. Announcing that the whole Free Trade ticket had triumphed in Charleston by more than 100 votes, the editor of the Pendleton Messenger declared, “The election turned entirely on principle. The popularity of men had little or no influence.” An editorial in the Camden and Lancaster Beacon rejoiced that Charleston could be “hailed once more by every republican son of Carolina as the Charleston of ’98 and the Charleston of ’76.” Her best men had “united upon principle, having no common tie but their affection for their parent State, their hatred for her oppressions, and their duty to protect her.” The Beacon also noted that Abbeville, which had elected a full Unionist ticket in the prior election, had reversed to vote entirely for Nullifiers in the 1831 city elections. The editor surmised that the tables had turned “thanks to the industry of the State’s friends,” and that “the whole State, from seaboard to the mountains, is undergoing the happy influence of enquiry after truth, which will set all things right.” According to the Southern Times and State Gazette, the spontaneous celebration in Columbia upon learning of both these “Republican victories” resembled those “made illustrious by the news of the victories of our second war of independence.” The atmosphere of the Greenville Mountaineer office was much more somber. Its editor bemoaned the election results, proclaiming them to be the work of “the

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most active and indefatigable managers ever known,” while “the Union party are most shamefully careless and inactive.”

**Anti-Tariff Convention and Continued Forbearance**

Newspapers on both sides of the issue indicated toward the end of September that they believed the legislature would nullify the tariffs when its session began at the end of the year. After gaining tremendous ground during the summer and early fall, however, the Free Trade Party lost some momentum in the wake of the Anti-Tariff Convention in Philadelphia. On the eve of the convention, the nullification papers expressed doubt that much good would come of the meeting. Because of partisan and sectional delegations, the editors doubted that the convention would be homogeneous in its opposition to the tariff or the views entertained of the extent of evil inflicted upon the country. Nonetheless, the *Camden and Lancaster Beacon* hoped that by trying the convention as a means of redress, the Nullifiers would sufficiently “stamp the seal of falsehood upon the imputations daily cast on us, of a disposition to effect revolution and disunion.” The *Pendleton Messenger*’s chief echoed those sentiments, declaring that their “desire to adopt every probable measure for bringing their Tariff brethren to a sense of justice, and only in the last resort, to interpose the sovereignty of the State as a protection for her citizens” proved that the party was not hostile to the Union.

According to the Nullifiers, that vindication was the only real result of the convention. Although the partisan squabbling among South Carolinians did not come to pass as predicted by

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editors on both sides, no practical solution came out of the discussion among the delegates. The participants could not agree on whether the tariffs were unconstitutional, but they did concur that the acts were unjust and ought to be modified. Nearly unanimously, the convention passed a resolution merely to recommend that the president appoint one member from each of the fifteen states represented in the convention to a committee that would prepare a memorial to Congress on the tariff and ask for a modification that would make it equal in its operation on the different states.  

The *Camden and Lancaster Beacon* declared that the convention “infused new vigor into the hopes of the hoping party,” which perpetually clung to prophecies built on the next Congress. Even South Carolina’s fiercely pro-nullification governor proclaimed in his December address to the state legislature that South Carolina should await the effect of the Anti-Tariff Convention on Congress before taking any further action. Nullification papers protested, declaring any continued forbearance a mistake. A month after the convention, they noted that tariff proponents’ only move toward conciliation was to recommend reducing duties on all articles not manufactured in the United States. The editors reminded readers that these duties were the only ones equal to all sections of the country. By removing them, Congress would remove the only duties the manufactures shelled out, leaving taxes paid entirely by the plantation states and making the tariffs even more unequal. Furthermore, the Free Trade editors reported that Tariff Conventions had met in Boston and New York, where resolutions were passed declaring the tariffs essential to the welfare of the North. According to those conventions’ delegates, to abandon the tariffs would be ruinous to the manufactures, and the government must remain pledged to their continuance unaltered. Therefore, the *Charleston Mercury* insisted, the South would receive no relief from Congress. Its editor pleaded with South Carolinians not to wait and

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197 Pendleton Messenger, 26 October 1831, p. 2; Camden and Lancaster Beacon, 18 October 1831, p. 2.
suffer longer while the American System perpetuated itself. But the legislature heeded the
governor’s instruction and took no action.\textsuperscript{198}

Convention opponents argued in 1830 that the American System was crumbling and that
if South Carolina was patient, Congress would reduce or repeal the protective duties on imports
that the state found so oppressive. When the 21\textsuperscript{st} Congress did nothing to modify the tariff
during its second session in the winter of 1831, the patience of the Free Trade Party ran out.
That Congress heaped internal improvement and U.S. Bank measures atop the pile of American
System legislation gave the Nullifiers even more cause to advocate immediate action.

Free Trade newspapers filled their columns with arguments in favor of nullification based
on the patriotism of Revolutionary soldiers who did not want to see the Constitution they fought
to establish destroyed, the doctrines of Republican forefathers James Madison and Thomas
Jefferson, and the precedents set by other states who had effectively nullified the actions of the
federal government from 1798 to 1831. The Nullifiers also elevated native son John C. Calhoun
to hero status, particularly after he was vindicated in their eyes by controversial correspondence
with President Andrew Jackson.

As the rift grew between Calhoun and Jackson, so did a parallel gap between the
Nullifiers and Unionists of South Carolina. The Union Party aimed to distance itself from what
it perceived as revolutionary aims on the part of the Free Trade Party, planning its own
Independence Day celebration and appointing its own delegates to the Anti-Tariff Convention in
Philadelphia. If the Union Party looked to ascend to domination, as some of the Free Trade
papers speculated, its plan backfired in the wake of correspondence between the Unionists and

\textsuperscript{198} Pendleton Messenger, 2 November 1831, p. 2, 23 November 1831, p. 2; Charleston Mercury, reprinted in Pendleton Messenger, 2 November 1831, p. 2; Camden and Lancaster Beacon, 8 November 1831, p. 2, 6
December 1831, p. 2; emphasis in original.
President Jackson. The Free Trade Party became solidified in its opposition to Jackson and the Union Party, and the entire party found new enthusiasm for nullification. Throughout the summer and early fall, Free Trade meetings and the formation of Free Trade and State Rights Associations throughout the state—including formerly staunch Unionist districts—demonstrated that the party had gained tremendous strength, as did the election of full Free Trade tickets in Charleston and Abbeville. The language of Free Trade advocates had become more moderate and their arguments had become clearer and more cohesive, whereas the Unionists simply continued to harp on disunionist tendencies that the Nullifiers successfully refuted. This along with the Union Party’s lack of organization and mobility may have led to its temporary downfall.

Following the Anti-Tariff Convention, however, nullification clamor cooled somewhat, and the state government chose to wait out Congress one more session before taking action. Forbearance truly would last only for a season. At the close of 1831, Revolutionary War veteran and nullification advocate Thomas Sumter made the following prediction in a letter to the *Pendleton Messenger*, which proved eerily prophetic: “The year 1832—The period when the character of the State of South Carolina and of her inhabitants shall be fixed forever; when no middle course shall be open to them.”

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6. THE TARIFF OF 1832 AND NULLIFICATION

As the 22\textsuperscript{nd} Congress began its first session in the winter of 1832, the Union papers appeared hopeful at first that Congress finally would redress their grievances over the Tariff of 1828. An editorial in the *Greenville Mountaineer* was representative of the Union stance, calling for a reduction and looking forward to the resultant restoration of “peace, harmony and good feeling” in South Carolina. Likewise, the *Charleston Courier* hoped for peace and believed that if excitement could be calmed, a reduction agreeable to both sides could be enacted. The Union men grew less optimistic as the debate wore on, though. While Kentucky Senator Henry Clay worked to enact a compromise, the *Mountaineer* expressed that the Unionists likely would “be content for the moment” with any reductions offered but did not believe anything would be satisfactory to the Nullifiers. He was right.\textsuperscript{200}

The Free Trade press pushed for a full repeal of the tariff; nothing else would be acceptable. An editorial in the *Camden and Lancaster Beacon* declared that acceding to any compromise would be a compromise of principles and of constitutional rights, which would be a deep disgrace. Furthermore, editors in Camden, Pendleton, and Charleston predicted that any modification would make the tariff more oppressive because reductions would be on articles not manufactured in the United States. Thus, the manufacturing states would pay nothing, increasing the tariff’s inequality. Duties aiming to “destroy the South” would be retained, and some probably even increased, showing “a deliberate, cold-blooded determination, on the part of the majority, notwithstanding all the sufferings and entreaties of the South, to rivet upon them the

\textsuperscript{200} *Greenville Mountaineer*, 7 January 1832, p. 2, 7 April 1832, p. 2, 12 May 1832, p. 2; *Charleston Courier*, 25 April 1832, p. 2, 12 June 1832, p. 2.
most odious, unequal and oppressive system of taxation that ever disgraced a civilized
government.” Free Trade editors also insisted that the systemizers in Congress would keep up
their great efforts to increase the expenditures of the government—particularly for internal
improvements—to as large an extent as possible so as to have an excuse for keeping up the
duties to defray costs. Again, the *Mercury* chief argued that continued forbearance would be
South Carolina’s downfall. The *Messenger* joined the *Mercury*’s call for resistance, declaring it
“beyond all reasonable doubt that the South must choose between peaceful resistance by the
State Governments, and unconditional submission to the will of the monopolists.” The upcountry
editor argued that South Carolinians should uphold their beliefs that the states have rights and
not submit to a Congress exercising unlimited power. Editorials in the *Camden and Lancaster
Beacon* urged the same, proclaiming that those unwilling to resist must be willing to yield their
rights, abandon the Constitution, and be “despoiled of the fair and honest earnings of our
labor.”

The controversial tariff modifications and other matters kept Congress in session well
into July, four months beyond its usual adjournment date. On July 14, the body did repeal the
Tariff of 1828. It also passed a tariff bill, however, that established new duties on
unmanufactured wool and hemp; woolen, cotton, and silk cloths; floor cloths and matting;
several iron items; firearms and tools; brown sugar and sugar cane syrup; japanned and plated
wares; salt; tea; slates; lead; glass items; olive oil; wine; baskets; and assorted accessories

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201 “The State Rights and Free Trade Convention,” *Charleston Mercury*, 27 February 1832, p. 2;
March 1832, p. 2, 4 April 1832, p. 2; “The Crisis,” *Camden and Lancaster Beacon*, 28 February 1832, p. 3;
“McLane’s Report on the Tariff,” *Camden and Lancaster Beacon*, 15 May 1832, p. 3; *Camden and Lancaster
Beacon*, 21 February 1832, p. 2, 3 April 1832, p. 3.
(millinery, umbrellas, etc.). Although many of these duties were reduced from those in the Tariff of 1828, some were increased.202

Once the Tariff of 1832 passed, the *Mercury* and *Beacon* lambasted the South Carolina congressmen who voted for it and bemoaned that the protective system had been maintained “even more odiously than before.” The editors insisted that the Free Trade papers’ fears had come to pass; whereas the prior tariff allowed the southern states the consolation that their northern brethren shouldered some (though an unequal share) of the burden, the new policy placed the entire protective portion “exclusively and ruinously on the South.” It continued “with destructive rigor” the duties on the foreign articles that constituted the principle exchanges for productions of the southern states, while those articles consumed at the North were admitted duty free. A writer called “Chatham” in the *Mercury* perceived that the duties on woolens, cottons, iron, and salt had been increased. Furthermore, these taxes upon the South were to be levied without necessity, as the public debt had been paid. The *Mercury* chief questioned why the Union Party was willing to accept bills of so-called compromise that continued the protective system, and how the Unionist papers could claim that their beloved Congressman William Drayton thought the tariff system inexpedient and unconstitutional when his vote clearly demonstrated his support of the measure. An editorial in the *Beacon* accused Drayton of “unconditional surrender of the Southern cause to the Tariff party.”203

The *Charleston Courier*, on the other hand, was pleased with the measure and praised Drayton for his part in bringing it about. Unlike the *Mercury*, the *Courier* did not believe the

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202 Act of July 14, 1832, ch. 227, 4 Stat. 583.
congressman had compromised his principles by allowing the tariff to continue but instead was
glad that the taxes were somewhat reduced. The editor believed Drayton chose the lesser of two
evils: “half a loaf is better than no bread.” The Greenville Mountaineer agreed. Ever the
advocate of peaceful forbearance, the Greenville chief proclaimed himself “willing to put up
with the present bill until the next session of Congress.” By his calculations, reductions
amounted to more than $5 million, more than $1 million of which affected duties on items
produced domestically. Furthermore, he argued that many of the individual duties were less than
what had been established in 1816, when South Carolina had no qualms with the protective
tariff. The Mountaineer editor praised Drayton for his vote on a measure that was “incomparably
better than that of 1828,” and concurred with the congressman’s assessment that the tariff would
experience further reductions in the following session. He thought it ridiculous that the Nullifiers
considered the protective system permanently fixed, leaving no choice but for the state to
intercede. The Courier chief similarly proclaimed the Nullifiers to have lost their minds if they
truly believed the new tariff law was more oppressive than the last. The Camden Journal
chastised nullification leaders, particularly those in elected office, for trying to convince the
people that their burdens had been increased when plain numbers clearly showed the opposite to
be true. 204

Thus, the tariff reductions did nothing to shorten the gap between Unionists and Free
Trade men. The Pendleton Messenger felt the Congressional action confirmed suspicions that the
federal government would do nothing to relieve the South’s suffering and hoped the failure to
satisfactorily address the tariff would bring greater unanimity among the state regarding what to
do. Instead, it caused greater conflict. Whereas the Free Trade sect saw the tariff reductions as

204 Charleston Courier, 24 July 1832, p. 2, 1 August 1832, p. 2, 25 August 1832, p. 2; Greenville
Mountaineer, 4 August 1832, p. 2, 25 August 1832, p. 2, 1 September 1832, p. 3, 22 September 1832, p. 2; Camden
Journal, reprinted in Charleston Courier, 1 August 1832, p. 2.
proof that the tariff would endure and pushed for unqualified resistance, Unionists believed that the system was falling with ever greater momentum and encouraged forbearance until it tottered altogether. The *Mountaineer* noted that the pinnacle of the crisis was approaching and that the people were left to choose between submission to Congress’s actions or revolution.\(^{205}\)

**Nullification Argument Resumes**

As it had for four years, the debate over whether and how to respond to Congress’s actions played out in the newspapers, with each side accusing the other of exciting the state’s passions.

In pushing for nullification, the *Charleston Mercury* and *Camden and Lancaster Beacon* argued that the government had been operating outside its legitimate authority and needed to be forced to operate equally and impartially, or, the *Mercury*’s editor argued, “this confederacy will be dissolved.” Editorials called nullification the only medium between slavery and liberty and insisted that the state act immediately. “Whilst we deliberate whether we shall save ourselves from ruin, the waves of tyranny are rolling over and destroying us,” the Charleston editor proclaimed. A *Mercury* writer called “Sydney” penned a series on nullification assuring timid readers that the doctrine was entirely sanctioned by the Constitution, which allows for the states to interpose against invasion of public liberty by the national authority, and that it would operate as a defensive measure no more dangerous than any other state law.\(^{206}\)

The *Pendleton Messenger*’s editor similarly proclaimed himself “decidedly in favour [sic] of Nullification, as the only remedy which can be efficacious, and at the same time preserve

\(^{205}\) *Pendleton Messenger*, 1 August 1832, p. 2, *Greenville Mountaineer*, 5 May 1832, p. 2.

the Union of the States.” Yet he remained willing to try other modes of resistance, if the Nullifiers and Unionists could agree upon one. The Pendleton chief believed that a majority of the Free Trade party was “not so devotedly wedded to their favourite remedy, as to refuse to come to any adjustment whatsoever, of their differences with those who, like them, love liberty above all things, and have determined to resist the encroachments of tyranny.” He claimed that if the Union Party would resolve that it would not continue submitting to the unequal and oppressive taxation, “we would be willing to extend to them the right hand of fellowship, and almost give them a *carte blanche*, as to the mode of resistance, provided the Union should be preserved as long as possible.” The *Messenger*’s editor proclaimed himself unready for secession or disunion, and he did not believe the situation would come to that. Nor did he believe nullification would result in it. He regarded nullification as a middle ground between submission and disunion, calling it “the conservative principle, which if anything can, is to preserve these States from dismemberment.” The time would come to discuss submission or secession only if the Republican method of state interposition failed.207

The Nullifiers continued to frame their battle as one between Federalists and Republicans, claiming the famed Republican Thomas Jefferson as the patriarch of their political family and originator of their doctrines. Editorials in the *Pendleton Messenger* noted many parallels between the tariff conflict and the Alien and Sedition discord at the turn of the nineteenth century. The upcountry editor argued that principles never changed; the Federalism that flourished under President John Adams was the very same espoused by the Tariff Party of the 1830s, who advocated the assumption of unconstitutional authority by an overly-powerful

general government. The *Messenger* chief contended that even the language of the Unionists echoed the cries of treason, war, bloodshed, and disunion uttered by the Federalists of old.208

Free Trade newspapers asserted that the only means of combating such a foe was the same doctrine that spurred the political revolution of 1801—nullification. They attributed to Jefferson the doctrine that the sovereign states have the right to interpose when the government transcends the limits of the Constitution by vetoing offensive legislative acts. As the Unionist press attempted to cast doubt on Jefferson’s fatherhood or even sanction of nullification, Free Trade editors and correspondents provided letters and manuscripts that they believed proved he both created and upheld the policy. One letter from 1826 even demonstrated that Jefferson opposed the burgeoning American system and insisted that means of redress beyond reason and argument were necessary to protect the Constitution. Nullifiers continued to invoke Jefferson’s name at their meetings and celebrations, often pairing it with that of their contemporary hero Calhoun as dual mascots of their cause.209

Unionist newspapers countered with statements that attaching the venerable Jefferson’s name to the nullification doctrine was ridiculous. A *Charleston Courier* correspondent argued that the Kentucky Resolution Jefferson wrote against the Alien and Sedition Acts did not give one state the power to veto the solemn acts of all others, but authorized the several sovereign states to seek redress for constitutional infractions together. The correspondent further contended that language in the resolution manuscript upon which the Nullifiers relied as proof of Jefferson’s sanction appeared to have been stricken out, proving that upon further reflection,
Jefferson had abandoned the idea. An editorial in the *Courier* presented an extract from Jefferson’s memoir that called any confederation defective if its Congress could not act immediately on the people without approval from the several legislatures. That what Jefferson called a fundamental defect, Calhoun called a fundamental principle of government demonstrated that the latter did not draw his doctrine from the former; Calhoun alone was the “author of this novel heresy.” The editor of the *Greenville Mountaineer* concurred, noting Jefferson’s belief that it was better to tolerate some errors in government than to dissolve it every time a dispute arose. Revolution should be considered only when the states were in danger of submission to a government without limitation of powers, which the Greenville chief did not think was the case. Furthermore, the upcountry editor avowed that even if Jefferson was the father of nullification, that did not make it right. “If the bantling of Nullification was begotten by Mr. Jefferson,” he proclaimed, “it was conceived in a high party excitement, and may therefore be termed the offspring of his passion, and not his reason.” The same could be said of the Nullifiers of 1832.  

That nullification was treasonous and would lead to secession and civil war remained the chief arguments of the Unionist papers. One writer in the *Charleston Courier* compared the Nullifiers to quack doctors who unnecessarily lop off limbs to preserve the body, whereas “a good and intelligent surgeon would first take a view of the whole distemper before giving his sanction to such mutilations, which often have no other effect than that of weakening the body, and hurrying the patient to the grave.” An editorial in the *Courier* also argued that nullification would be ruinous whether peaceable or not, because it would reduce the government to a “powerless pageant, too imbecile and contemptible to preserve peace at home, or ensure respect

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abroad; and lead to all the calamitous results that are usually incident to anarchy and misrule.”

The Greenville Mountaineer editor insisted that the people of his district had decided against nullification and could not be persuaded, and that they stood ready to undertake any sort of resistance to any acts of nullification that may be passed by the state’s legislature. A majority of the people of South Carolina, the Union papers argued, saw nullification as a greater evil than the tariff and was not willing to endanger the Union, “which Washington, the father of this country, pronounced the great palladium of our liberties.” The Courier’s editor avowed that the Unionists would not “abandon their ground, and join in the mad crusade against the institutions of their fathers.” He admonished the Nullifiers for attempting to “coerce their opposing fellow citizens to subscribe to a political faith against their consciences.”

As an alternative to nullification, the Union party suggested gathering the southern states in a convention to determine the will of all. Unionist papers discussed the idea of a Southern Convention throughout the year, and the Union Party passed resolutions officially suggesting the measure at a September meeting of its delegates from throughout the state in Columbia. One of the resolutions appointed nine delegates to visit the legislatures of the other southern states and solicit their cooperation. The Mountaineer expressed no doubt that every Unionist in South Carolina preferred a Southern Convention to nullification. Such a meeting would represent the wishes of everyone suffering from the tariff. The upcountry editor even was willing to pursue nullification if that was the will of all southern states. He argued, “For the State to act alone is the height of folly and quixotism,” but to resist with the consent of all concerned would assure South Carolina the assistance of her sister states in the hour of danger. The Courier agreed,

stating, “If she must RESIST, let that resistance be by the CONFEDERATED SOUTH.”

Unionists cited their call for a Southern Convention as evidence that the party was not sitting idly. An editorial in the *Courier* argued, “This is doing things as they ought to be done, and should satisfy the friends of Nullification of the zeal and sincerity of the Union Party.”

In response, the Free Trade papers insisted that the call for a Southern Convention was a weak mode of resistance offered as a means of delaying inevitable nullification. They claimed that it would take years to induce the other states to even take up the subject, and reaching an agreement among all of them was unlikely. The only potential result was a memorial to Congress, which the Anti-Tariff Convention in Philadelphia already had done. The time to resist in earnest had come, and nullification was the only mode the Free Trade editors believed would work. Unfortunately, the Free Trade editors posited, the hatred which the Union Party had professed for the tariff had been “swallowed up in their superior hatred of nullification.”

Nullification newspapers asserted that the ultimate goal of a Southern Convention thus would be to put down the Free Trade Party. The *Pendleton Messenger* argued that the Unionists would prefer no remedy at all and only hoped that a Southern Convention eventually would lead to submission. Pendleton and Camden editors also accused some Southern Convention proponents of veiled disunion aims, just as the Unionists had done when the Free Trade papers advocated a South Carolina convention in 1830. They claimed that a gathering of the southern states easily could result in the formation of a southern confederacy, which would make the Unionists hypocrites. The *Messenger*’s chief also argued that such a convention would violate the Constitution, which forbids the states from entering into a treaty or alliance.

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Nullification and the City/State Elections of 1832

Principles involved in the potential means of redress against the tariff dominated the city and state elections of 1832. Outspoken nullification advocate Henry Pinckney again was the Free Trade candidate for city intendant (mayor) of Charleston, this time running against Henry de Saussure, a self-proclaimed Federalist. As the polling date approached, the Charleston Courier published an editorial calling on voters to be steadfast in their duty of selecting city leaders for the coming year, for the very fate of the Union was in their hands. The editor wrote,

To be even lukewarm in this day of peril to our best and dearest interests, partakes of the nature of crime. The crisis, pregnant with portentous events—boding ruin to the institutions, under which we have so long flourished as an united people, and threatening to subvert regulated liberty and set up licentiousness and anarchy in its stead—calls every man to his post—there to discharge his duty, not only by depositing his vote in the ballot-box, but by doing all that zeal, vigilance and activity can accomplish.  

When the Free Trade ticket for intendant and wardens experienced an even more decisive victory than in the previous year, Nullifiers throughout the state rejoiced. The Pendleton Messenger called the results “cheering to the friends of the cause elsewhere,” and expressed hope that the success in Charleston would “animate our friends in the back country districts to renewed exertions, in favour [sic] of liberty, and the propagation of truth and sound political doctrines.” Columbia Free Trade men gathered in spontaneous celebration, declaring the Charleston triumph a foreshadowing of things to come in the October legislative election. The Charleston Mercury—which had come under the control of John Stuart, brother-in-law to radical nullification leader Robert Barnwell Rhett—agreed. Its editor attributed the strength of the Free Trade Party to “free discussion,” as well as the purity of the cause. The editor was confident that the Nullifiers would be able to effect the call for a convention by the election of a constitutional

“Progress of Submission,” Camden and Lancaster Beacon, 20 June 1832, p. 3; Camden and Lancaster Beacon, 29 June 1832, p. 1.

214 Charleston Courier, 3 September 1832, p. 2.
majority, but reminded readers that the Union party needed to muster only one vote in excess of
a one-third minority to defeat it. He called on voters not to let down their guard and to continue
their support of state rights, Constitution, and liberty. On the other hand, the Courier told
Charleston Unionists not to be discouraged by the city election results but to remain firm in their
principles and let the legislative ballot box be their weapon against nullification.215

As the legislative election approached, newspapers statewide hotly contested the relative
merits of the Unionist and Free Trade causes. The Greenville Mountaineer proclaimed the
election to turn entirely on principle. He declared, “Men are out of the question now; and
Measures should govern every vote.” In the legislative election two years prior, he noted,
hundreds of men had voted for candidates opposed to them in politics because of private
friendships, personal regard, and qualifications, but times had changed. Whereas there was little
danger of a nullification convention in 1830, it was more likely in 1832. Unionists needed to
prevent the calamity by voting only for men who valued the Union, such as the four legislative
candidates the Mountaineer endorsed.216

Although Unionist sentiment prevailed in the upcountry districts of Greenville and
Spartanburg, the Pendleton Messenger listed several neighboring districts where political
meetings indicated the citizens were entirely for Free Trade. Among them were York, Union,
Laurens, and Chester, which the Messenger’s editor described as “heretofore considered
doubtful.” Like the Mountaineer chief, his neighbor at Pendleton declared the scales to have
shifted in favor of a convention. He proclaimed that only a Federalist would object, believing

1832, p. 2; “Triumph of State Rights Principles in Charleston,” Pendleton Messenger, 12 September 1832, p. 2;
“Strength of the State Rights Party,” Charleston Mercury, 2 October 1832, p. 2; “The Star Spangled Banner has
been unfurled, and still floats upon the breeze: To the Union Party and Friends of Peace,” Charleston Courier, 19
September 1832, p. 2.
216 Greenville Mountaineer, 21 April 1832, p. 2, 5 May 1832, p. 2; emphasis in original.
that the states did not have rights other than those graciously allowed them by the general government. Thanks to tracts distributed by the State Rights and Free Trade Associations, the people of South Carolina had come to understand their rights and, as true Republicans, believed that a convention was the most democratic means of redress. Voters now refused to be frightened by the desperate attempts of the Unionists to conjure up “phantoms of war, pestilence, and famine.”

Free Trade papers in the middle of the state accused the Unionist candidates in their districts of myriad sins in their alleged desperation to overcome nullification. The editor of the *Columbia Telescope* recounted every belligerent word uttered by the Richland District Unionists, including one who had besmirched the memory of the recently-deceased nullifier and Revolutionary War hero Thomas Sumter, another who was an avowed tariff supporter that had called Thomas Jefferson a traitor, and a third who had accused the people of the district of being bribed into nullification with food and whiskey, because “they understood no more of constitutional liberty than his horse.” The Columbia editor told the people to vote instead for the Free Trade ticket, which consisted of “men of integrity and firmness” who could “maintain the former honor of South Carolina, and win for her fresh glory in the great contest in which she is engaged.”

The Unionists of Kershaw District were even worse than those in Richland, according to the editor of the *Camden and Lancaster Beacon*. They had put forth Col. James Chestnut as a candidate for Kershaw’s Senate seat, despite his opinions that the tariff was constitutional and not oppressive. In several editorials, the Beacon chief provided evidence of Chestnut’s pro-tariff

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policies, including correspondence, his speeches at public meetings, and his refusal to be appointed as a delegate to the Anti-Tariff Convention in Philadelphia the prior year. In fact, the editor argued, Chestnut was a manufacturer who had prospered under the tariff policy. He asked the people of Kershaw not to “voluntarily and incautiously lend themselves, by electing him to the Legislature, as instruments of supporting that odious, oppressive and unconstitutional Tariff which they have on so many occasions heretofore pledged themselves to resist by all the means in their power.” He also cited the Union Party’s endorsement of Chestnut as proof that the party had turned out to be “bona fide advocates of the Tariff.”

Although the Union ticket prevailed in Greenville, and by an even higher margin than it had two years earlier, the Mountaineer’s editor lamented that the “pestilential influence of Nullification has been spreading in every other part of the State like the besom of destruction.” In most districts statewide, the cause of Free Trade triumphed, and voters elected nullification legislators in excess of the constitutional majority required to call a convention. Because the election had turned completely on political principle and not men, the Pendleton Messenger declared the result to be decisive of the political character of the state in its adherence to “the old republican doctrines of ’98.” The Charleston Mercury rejoiced that the people were too enlightened to be deceived by claims that the Tariff of 1832 was any better than the acts under which they had for years been laboring. They understood that “unless it be arrested by the interposition of the sovereign power of the State, the protective system will be fixed upon them as the settled policy of the country, and they will be doomed forever, as ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water,’ to an organized aristocracy of private speculators and monopolists.” As for the

\[219\] Camden and Lancaster Beacon, 25 August 1832, p. 2-3, 1 September 1832, p. 3, 6 October 1832, p. 2.
outcry of civil war and revolution, the *Mercury*’s editor proclaimed it to have passed “unheeded as the idle wind.—The people were no longer to be affected by that thrice-told tale.”

Nonetheless, the *Greenville Mountaineer* continued to fear civil war. He proclaimed the scepter to be in the hands of Nullifiers, declaring the Union Party absolved of responsibility for the blood spilt or the discomfiture incurred as a result of the convention that most certainly would be called. Despite the protests the Unionist papers raised, the *Pendleton Messenger* believed the Union Party would stand by the people’s choice and let the state try the remedy of nullification. If nullification failed, the editor promised to try any other remedy that may be proposed, “or submit, if such should be the decree of the people, to what we deem a gross usurpation of our rights.”

**Nullification Convention**

Governor James Hamilton immediately called for a special session of the newly-elected legislature. Because the new legislature met before the old one’s term had expired, the *Charleston Courier* argued that the meeting was unconstitutional and not binding. The Free Trade papers countered that the governor’s decision had been sustained by the Court of Appeals, the Attorney General, and “other eminent gentlemen of the bar,” not to mention the will of the people. Regardless of the technical legality of the special legislative session, the overwhelmingly Free Trade body called for a convention of the state to decide her course.

Maintaining that the call of the legislature was unconstitutional and the convention thus invalid, the Union Party of Charleston refused to run candidates for convention delegates.

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221 *Greenville Mountaineer*, 13 October 1832, p. 2; *Pendleton Messenger*, 17 October 1832, p. 2.

222 *Charleston Courier*, 15 October 1832, p. 2; *Columbia Telescope*, 9 October 1832, p. 2; *Pendleton Messenger*, 10 October 1832, p. 3; Publicola, “For the Mercury,” *Charleston Mercury*, 24 October 1832, p. 2.
Unionists in Edgefield District also let the Free Trade men run unopposed, arguing that there was no need to keep up the party excitement after the Free Trade ticket had won so decisively in the legislative election. The Unionists of Greenville and Columbia, however, thought the failure to appoint delegates would be a mistake. If they gave up now, the Greenville Mountaineer avowed, the party would deserve the label of submissionists. He declared, “It is to be hoped that we will show our opponents that we are as tenacious of our rights when in the minority of South Carolina, as they are clamorous of theirs when in the minority of the United States.” Unionist legislators submitted an edict from Columbia that their partisans in all districts should form a ticket. They also resolved that if the convention nullified, the Union Party should “cease all further opposition and support their state.” The Charleston Mercury praised the resolutions and proclaimed that those who heeded them were true patriots, whereas those who chose to “persevere in a bitter hostility” would be “deserted by their former associates within the State, and be left a pitiful factious handful, leagued in unholy resistance to South Carolina.”

Nonetheless, as the convention approached, the Union papers implored for something to be done to “check the violence and precipitance with which Nullification is spreading over our country.” Their editors had no doubt that further reductions of the Tariff would take place in the next congressional session and pleaded for the Nullifiers to wait before taking drastic measures.

The convention assembled on November 19 and drafted the Ordinance of Nullification, along with addresses explaining their actions. Against the protests of the Unionist newspapers, the convention passed the ordinance on November 24. It called the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832

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223 Edgefield Carolinian, reprinted in Charleston Mercury, 16 October 1832, p. 2; Greenville Mountaineer, 20 October 1832, p. 2, 17 November 1832, p. 2; Pendleton Messenger, 24 October 1832, p. 2, 31 October 1832, p. 3, 7 November 1832, p. 2; Charleston Mercury, 29 October 1832, p. 2; “The Charleston Union Party and the State Union Party,” Charleston Mercury, 1 November 1832, p. 2.

224 Greenville Mountaineer, 3 November 1832, p. 2; Charleston Courier, 26 October 1832, p. 2.
unconstitutional and declared them null and void within the state of South Carolina. The people of the state were not bound by the tariff laws nor required to pay the duties. The ordinance also authorized the legislature of South Carolina to pass any legislation necessary to prevent the federal government from collecting duties. Any efforts to coerce the state by military force or interruption of commerce would result in secession. Furthermore, the ordinance required all political or military officials to “take an oath well and truly to obey, execute, and enforce this ordinance.” Those who refused would be required to vacate their offices.\(^\text{225}\)

Once the convention passed the ordinance of nullification, the *Greenville Mountaineer* called it a Declaration of Independence and Dissolution of the Union. Its editor asserted that the purest and best men of the state are to be proscribed and hurled from office “in order to make room for subservient menials of the Jacobin Clubs.” No true Union man would take an oath of allegiance to the state. Unionist editors predicted that a bill of pains and penalties soon would follow from the legislature, making failure to obey the ordinance of nullification punishable by confiscation of property and forfeiture of life. “This is the glorious doctrine of Nullification, which has already torn society to pieces, and embittered the nearest and dearest relations of life,” declared the Greenville chief. He could only hope that when the people realized that nullification was not the peaceful and constitutional remedy they had been deluded to believe, they would “abandon the fatal heresy, and cleave to the Government of their fathers.” The *Charleston Courier* similarly labeled it an “act of virtual war against the General Government and of oppression on a large minority of the citizens of the State.” Its editor also accused the Nullifiers of a lawless usurpation of power beyond that of which the Free Trade Party had accused the

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\(^\text{225}\) South Carolina, *Journal of the Conventions of the People of South Carolina, Held in 1832, 1833, and 1852* (Columbia: R. W. Gibbes, 1860); South Carolina, *Proceedings of the Convention of South Carolina Upon the Subject of Nullification Including the Remarks of Governor Hamilton, on Taking the President's Chair: the Ordinance Nullifying the Tariff Laws and the Report Which Accompanied It: an Address to the People of the United States: an Address to the People of South Carolina* (Boston: Beals, Homer, 1832).
federal government. He denied that the acts of the convention were binding on the citizens because it was convened by a defective authority (legislators taking their seats before the old legislature adjourned); its representation was based not on population alone but on population and property, thus making it a tribunal not of the people but of “its lands, houses and negroes”; it deceived the people because it was called to provide a peaceable and constitutional remedy, without violating the existing State Constitution or the integrity of the Union; and it violated a federal constitution that allows for the establishment and collection of duties and imposts.\textsuperscript{226}

Although the Union Party papers protested loudly, the \textit{Charleston Mercury} claimed that Unionist politicians involved in the convention had fallen in line with the Nullifiers, and rightfully so. He declared, “Further opposition now would be hostility to their State, our common mother, and not to a party.” The \textit{Mercury} proclaimed the convention to have proven itself worthy of the crisis by adopting “the safest and most pacific in the boldest and most decisive measure.” He praised the delegates for including in the ordinance safeguards against any means of attempting to enforce the tariff by declaring that the moment such an attempt is made, the Union would be dissolved. Furthermore, the Charleston editor denied that the convention’s actions were unconstitutional, because any previous provision of the state constitution incompatible with the ordinance was virtually repealed by it.\textsuperscript{227}

Unlike the \textit{Mercury}, the \textit{Pendleton Messenger} acknowledged that Unionist delegates voted against the report, ordinance, and addresses. He questioned why, proclaiming that the report and addresses contained strong devotion to the Union and opinions that the nullification remedy was peaceful and conservative. The \textit{Messenger’s} editor thought it prudent, however, to


\textsuperscript{227} \textit{Charleston Mercury}, 26 November 1832, p. 2, 29 November 1832, p. 2, 30 November 1832, p. 2.
consider the “remote” possibility that the federal government might resort to force as a method of coercion, which he said would be tantamount to a dissolution of the Union. So did the Columbia Telescope. The Columbia chief believed the manner in which the state had nullified could “scarcely fail of peace,” but he proclaimed that if violence came, it would “spring from nothing short of the utter illegality and atrocity of the General Government.” Such refusal to accept a quiet redress and appeal to the sword would prove “beyond all possible doubt the necessity of our measure.”

**Nullification Proves Not So Peaceful**

At the end of 1832, President Jackson issued a proclamation rejecting the Nullifiers’ claims that the states retain sovereignty under the Constitution and calling for the nation’s military to stand ready against its internal foe. Around the same time, newly elected South Carolina Governor Robert Hayne delivered a message calling for volunteers to build the state’s militia. The newspapers disagreed on which measure was defensive and which offensive; the Free Trade papers claimed the governor was responding to the president’s hostility by building the militia as a precaution for self-protection, while the Unionists insisted the opposite was true.

Unionist newspapers praised the president’s proclamation, calling for the people of South Carolina to read it attentively, so that the “solemn truths which it contains sink deep into their hearts, and all may yet be well.” The Charleston Courier accused the nullification newspapers of exciting the people of South Carolina to the point of willingness to fight against her own nation, and beseeched the people of South Carolina to “resist the reckless infatuation and criminal ambition of those who would plunge her headlong into ruin.” The Greenville Mountaineer’s

228 Pendleton Messenger, 5 December 1832, p. 3; Columbia Telescope, 27 November 1832, p. 3.
229 United States and Andrew Jackson, Proclamation of Andrew Jackson, President of the United States, to the People of South Carolina, December 10, 1832 (Harrisburg: Singerly & Myers, 1864).
editor hoped that the proclamation would “ultimately stop the [nullification] leaders in their mad
career of disunion and revolution.” He lamented, however, that the state government’s attempts
to establish a volunteer militia to suppress insurrection by the Union party and repel invasion by
the U.S. government proved South Carolina was yet “doomed to experience all the horrors of
CIVIL WAR” and the fields of the country were to be “drenched with the BLOOD of her
citizens.” The Greenville chief and his counterpart at the Camden Journal did not believe the
people actually would volunteer to assist the revolutionaries in their treason but declared that if
they did, the Unionists would be prepared to defend against their brothers’ tyranny and die like
free men rather than live like slaves.\textsuperscript{230}

Based on communication its editors had received, the Columbia Telescope and
Charleston Mercury accused the Union Party of having discussions with Jackson about his
proclamation before it was issued and of advising the employment of armed force against their
state in asking for the assistance of the general government to put down nullification.
Furthermore, the Pendleton Messenger insisted that the Union party had conspired to cause panic
in the wake of the proclamation to gain power in the state. The Messenger editor railed against
the proclamation, declaring that it “goes the whole length of the doctrine of consolidation, not
only assuming for the Federal Government the right to judge of its own powers, but taking upon
himself the Executive organ of that government, this right, to its full extent.” He thought the
document was intended to frighten the people into submission but proclaimed instead of

\textsuperscript{230} “The President’s Proclamation,” Charleston Courier, 17 December 1832, p. 2; Charleston Courier, 20
February 1833, p. 2; Greenville Mountaineer, 29 December 1832, p. 3, 5 January 1833, p. 3; “Volunteers,” Camden
Journal, 3 March 1833, p. 3; emphasis in original.
cowering before the threats, South Carolinians would be roused to more determined resistance. Such resistance would not be by force, but through judicial tribunals.\textsuperscript{231}

Nonetheless, some of the Free Trade papers bragged of the preparations South Carolina was making in case Jackson dared to attempt coercion and warned that such bullying would bring disunion. Rather than civil war, the \textit{Charleston Mercury} proclaimed, the skirmish would be between two sovereigns, and it would be “war to the knife.” Whereas the \textit{Mercury} seemed hostile and dared the federal government to bring on the fight, the \textit{Pendleton Messenger} noted the militia preparations with hope that they would not be necessary. He described them as a precaution; despite measures on the part of the general government that threatened the peace and endangered the tranquility of South Carolina, the Pendleton editor insisted the state would “continue to exercise the utmost possible forbearance, acting strictly on the defensive, firmly resolved to commit no act of violence, but prepared as far as our means extend to resist aggression.” Its editor still wished for the Union to be preserved, but he praised South Carolinians for their readiness to defend their native soil, showing “a devotion to liberty becoming of a high minded and generous people.” The \textit{Columbia Telescope} declared that although thousands of patriotic sons of Carolina had volunteered, ready to defend her, the resolute and thorough preparation itself would be enough to deter an attack.\textsuperscript{232}

\textsuperscript{231} “Corroboration of the Union and Jackson plot to bring down war and invasion on their own State,” \textit{Columbia Telescope}, 29 January 1833, p. 3; “The Plot,” \textit{Charleston Mercury}, 22 December 1832, p. 2; \textit{Pendleton Messenger}, 26 December 1832, p. 3, 2 January 1833, p. 2.

**Compromise Tariff and Force Bill**

Anxious to bring an end to the crisis, Congress worked to prepare a compromise tariff that everyone would find acceptable. On 2 March 1833, the body passed an act gradually reducing the duties over the next decade until, by 1842, they would match the levels set in the innocuous Tariff of 1816.\footnote{Act of March 2, 1833, ch. 55, 4 Stat. 629.}

The Unionist papers praised the bill and rejoiced at the prospect of restored peace and harmony as well as the preservation of the Union by “the spirit of concession and compromise that presided at its formation.” Although not fully satisfied, even the Free Trade papers were willing to accept the measure. The *Charleston Mercury* proclaimed that although the provisions of the act fell short of what the South had a right to demand, it was a step toward relieving the region’s burden. The *Pendleton Messenger*’s editor similarly found the Compromise Tariff acceptable, although he lamented that it would take longer than most would like for the reduction to be complete. Nonetheless, the Pendleton editor and his counterpart at the *Columbia Telescope* congratulated the Nullifiers for pressuring Congress into measures much more beneficial to the South than what they could have expected without state interposition. They also proclaimed that by accepting the compromise, South Carolina had proved false the charges that she had shown disaffection to the Union and that she was unwilling to “submit to sacrifice for its preservation.” An editorial in the Unionist *Camden Journal*, on the other hand, accused the Nullifiers of aggravating the Tariff men in Congress to the southern states’ detriment. “Had the South acted in concert and nullification not raised her horrid head,” the Camden editor posited, “the Tariff would have been reduced much more.”\footnote{Charleston Courier, 20 February 1833, p. 2, 5 March 1833, p. 2; Greenville Mountaineer, 2 March 1833, p. 2, 9 March 1833, p. 2; “Mr. Clay’s Tariff Bill,” Camden Journal, 9 March 1833, p. 3; Camden Journal, 16...}
In the wake of the Compromise Tariff, the state convention regrouped and repealed the nullification ordinance, which the Unionist papers believed put an end to the controversy. The *Courier* rejoiced that the Union had been saved with its government erect and proclaimed nullification “either a dead letter or ‘a legend of the past’— the tariff question adjusted—peace and harmony, public and private, about to be restored.” Editorials in the *Greenville Mountaineer* expressed that its editor similarly expected the repeal to bring a period of peace and quiet. He professed an intention to focus his paper on items of more general interest to the community than the agitating political questions that had filled its columns for years.\(^{235}\)

The Free Trade papers were not so certain that peace would prevail, thanks to the Force Bill passed the same day as the Compromise Tariff. The act—which the South Carolina Convention nullified at the same time that it repealed its nullification of the tariffs—allowed injured parties in revenue cases to sue in court, authorized U.S. Marshals to detain parties who refused to obey the law, and, most importantly for the Free Trade Party, authorized the President to use armed forces to protect customs officers, prevent the unauthorized removal of untaxed cargo, and suppress insurrections.\(^{236}\)

Editorials in the *Pendleton Messenger* and *Columbia Telescope* called the Force Bill “a death blow at the sovereignty of the states.” Although the “bloody bill” could be regarded as mere bravado where coercion of the Nullifiers was concerned, the Pendleton chief declared its future operation and the principles involved to be “matters of high importance to the liberties of the country, and it deserves the execration of every freeman.” The *Messenger*’s editor called on the southern states to rally against it as the patriots of ‘98 did against the alien and sedition laws, March 1833, p. 3; *Charleston Mercury*, 23 February 1833, p. 2, 5 March 1833, p. 2, 27 March 1833, p. 3; *Columbia Telescope*, 26 February 1833, p. 2, 5 March 1833, p. 3, 12 March 1833, p. 2.

\(^{235}\) *Charleston Courier*, 21 March 1833, p. 2; *Greenville Mountaineer*, 23 March 1833, p. 2, 6 April 1833, p. 2.

\(^{236}\) Act of March 2, 1833, ch. 57, 4 *Stat.* 632.
whereas he expected “parasites of power in whom the thirst for office, and the desire for the
smiles of the Government, outweigh the devotion to liberty, to take the opposite side of the
question, as did the federalists of former days.” The Pendleton chief thought it a mistake to
imagine the great contest for State Rights at an end, asserting that they “had never been in more
imminent peril than at this moment, and nothing but the most steady vigilance, and the most
determined spirit of resistance to the unauthorized encroachments of the general government, can
preserve our republican institutions.” The Telescope advanced many of the same assertions,
adding that “the chief of this atrocious administration” was likely to “seize at once upon the
powers of this act and brandish them.”

The Charleston Mercury’s editor particularly was astounded that Gen. James Blair, one
of South Carolina’s own Congressmen, advocated the “Bill of Blood” on the grounds that the
House could not presume South Carolina would be satisfied with the Compromise Tariff. The
Charleston chief could not believe that while all others at Washington were congratulating
themselves on the prospect of returning tranquility, “the peaceable Unionists from this State
were aggrieved, and desirous that the sword should be drawn and brandished over S. Carolina,
whether she be satisfied or not with the partial surrender of her rights which has been wrung
from the manufacturers.” The Free Trade Party thus could not rest but had to remain diligent
against a wily partisan foe within the state, as well as a consolidationist federal government. The
Mercury’s editor declared that the Force Bill “may well premonish us of the doom that is in
reserve for this Confederacy—may well be regarded as the herald that announces the conflict to
be near—the cloud before the storm!”

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237 Pendleton Messenger, 27 March 1833, p. 3, 3 April 1833, p. 3, 10 April 1833, p. 3; Columbia Telescope, 12 March 1833, p. 2; “Our Position,” Columbia Telescope, 26 March 1833, p. 3.
238 “The Union Party and the Bill of Blood,” Charleston Mercury, 8 March 1833, p. 3; Charleston Mercury, 13 March 1833, p. 2, 18 March 1833, p. 2; emphasis in original.
Therein lies the essential difference between the Union and Free Trade papers. Through the height of the nullification crisis, the Unionist press presented a fairly united front. They generally found the tariff oppressive to southern interests, but they maintained hope that Congress eventually would address the region’s concerns and reduce the duties to an acceptable level. As their hope dwindled, they suggested South Carolina join with other southern states to decide the best course of action. Nullification did not seem the appropriate path; the Union papers believed the doctrine to be unconstitutional and equivalent to secession, and they feared it would bring about civil war. Once a compromise tariff passed and nullification was repealed, the Unionists believed the crisis had ended.

The Free Trade press held out no hope that Congress would address the issue to the satisfaction of southerners. Although the Free Trade papers advocated nullification, the *Messenger* seemed willing to try other modes of resistance, provided a majority of the state could agree on something. Though less conservative than the Unionist papers, once the Union became truly endangered, some Free Trade papers demonstrated that they wanted to see the Union preserved. The *Mercury*, on the other hand, pursued nullification with militancy and seemed ready to push further and secede if the situation warranted it. Whereas the Unionist papers and the more moderate Free Trade papers expressed fear that the hostility between state and nation would escalate to armed conflict, the *Mercury* welcomed war if it would achieve the ends it pursued. This radical stance likely can be attributed to the *Mercury*’s new direct connection to Robert Barnwell Rhett.

The repeal of the nullification ordinance did not mark the end of the controversy for any of the Free Trade papers. The Force Bill proved to them that the government wielded too much
power and foreshadowed more conflict to come. An editorial in the *Mercury* at the height of the crisis offers some explanation for this difference. The Unionist papers held the nation in higher esteem than their home state; although they longed to settle the economic crisis the tariff caused, they were willing to compromise in order to preserve the Union. However, the Free Trade papers saw the state of South Carolina as the ultimate authority and detested the government’s assertion of power above all—whether by the tariff or the Force Bill. Although some Free Trade papers found themselves torn when the potential for armed conflict arose, they still maintained their belief that a consolidated government should be resisted. The *Mercury* professed “the Crisis goes beyond nullification of the tariff; the real issue is whether the States shall preserve their individuality as Sovereigns, or be merged into one wide imperial realm; whether the people are hereafter to govern themselves or be the serfs of whatever combination of politicians shall acquire sway at Washington...It is the question of liberty or despotism.”

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[^239]: Charleston Mercury, 21 December 1832, p. 2.
7. CONCLUSION

Tariffs for the protection of domestic industry played a dominant role in the formation of a fissure between the South on one side, the North and the federal government on the other. Although southern states had few arguments when Congress passed its first set of such duties on exports in 1816, they began to protest when those duties were increased in 1824. Further increases in 1828, known to the southern states as the “Tariff of Abominations,” led to an outcry by many of the politicians, citizens, and newspaper editors of the South, particularly in South Carolina.

Ultimately the first state to secede on the eve of the Civil War, South Carolina erupted in controversy following the Tariff of 1828’s passage. Most could agree that the act was unconstitutional because the Constitution did not allow for the establishment of duties to protect one branch of industry over all others, unequal in its benefits (making the North more prosperous than the South), and oppressive to plantation states that had to rely on expensive northern goods or foreign imports made more costly by the duties. Factions formed, however, based on recommended means of redress. Partisan newspapers of that era became vocal supporters of one faction or the other and serve as a storehouse for their respective ideologies.

One camp grew out of anti-tariff meetings throughout the state during the summer of 1828. Citizens at these meetings heard impassioned addresses from their radical leaders and passed resolutions that called for unqualified resistance to what they perceived as a gross usurpation of power by the federal government. Rhetoric from those addresses and resolutions, as well as newspaper editorials and correspondence, echoed that of the American Revolution.
Those resistant to the tariff even compared their situation to that of the patriots who risked their lives to resist tyranny during the Revolutionary War.

An opposing faction formed in response to the radical group’s cries of disunion. Alarmed at the prospect of harm to the nation and its government, some editors and correspondents began arguing against the need for unqualified resistance. They declared the tariff to be constitutional in that the national charter allowed Congress to regulate foreign trade for the general welfare of the nation. They also insisted that South Carolina would not be injured as much as the radical anti-tariff camp would have the people believe. As an alternative to militant resistance, moderate editors suggested that South Carolina become more involved in manufacturing. That way, they would not need to purchase the goods from the North or abroad, and the state would receive an equal share of the tariff’s protection. Regardless of whether the state developed a homespun industry, she should honor her Revolutionary heroes by protecting the nation for which they fought, not by tearing it apart.

At the end of 1828, South Carolina’s legislature ordered the printing of a pamphlet entitled the “South Carolina Exposition and Protest,” which South Carolina’s congressmen presented to the national legislature. Authored anonymously by Vice President John C. Calhoun, a native South Carolinian, the document argued that the tariff was unconstitutional and impolitic because it was not for the general welfare. The document further posited that a state in its sovereignty holds the right to veto acts of the federal government that violate the Constitution, by declaring such acts null and void within the state’s borders; to divest the states of that authority was to consolidate the power of government under the federal head. The Exposition avowed that if Congress did not repeal the offensive tariff, South Carolina would have no choice but to interpose.
Calhoun’s “Exposition and Protest” set off a new firestorm of controversy in South Carolina’s newspapers over the potential for disunion. The Exposition bolstered the more radical anti-tariff writers, who proclaimed to love the Union and wished to see it preserved, but only if the Constitution could be restored to its original purity. The tariff—along with legislation appropriating for internal improvements within the states—indicated a government of unlimited powers, and the disunionists argued that separation was the only way to preserve the rights of the sovereign states. The disunionists’ complaint was not with the federal government alone. They also directed their hostilities toward the northern states, whom they accused of partnering with the federal government to enact policies that would lead to the South’s downfall, resulting in the North’s economic and political domination. Continued use of parallels to the Revolutionary War era supported the push for resistance. Radical editors also began drawing on the doctrines of Thomas Jefferson, particularly his assertion that the usurpation of rights by a centralized government was worse than disunion. Newly-elected President Andrew Jackson served as the only calming influence, because the resistance press expected him to revolutionize the government and work toward the tariff’s repeal.

More conservative newspapers continued refuting the arguments of the disunionists and recommending moderate alternatives such as refusing to purchase northern goods and establishing homespun industry. These writers denied that individual states had the right to declare the laws of the federal government null and void, arguing that only the federal judiciary had that power. Moderate writers also accused their radical counterparts of deceiving the public on purpose, knowing full well that the tariff was not all that harmful. They contended that the state had no right to intercede even if it was.
Disagreement heightened as the first session of the 21st Congress progressed, and many editors saw no hope of relief from the oppressive system. Although some preached continued forbearance and patience in the wake of tariff reductions and President Jackson’s veto of an internal improvement bill, others saw those actions as proof that the American System (consolidated power in the federal government, to the unequal benefit of northern states over the South) would be fixed forever if South Carolina did not resist. Measures proposed in Congress to abolish slavery in Washington City and to appropriate for the shipment of freed slaves back to Africa increased their resolve.

The Webster-Hayne debates surrounding a resolution to restrict the sale of public lands instigated discussion among South Carolina’s writers about whether a state had the authority to void offending laws of Congress, which served to further divide the state’s factions. As the moderate sect demonstrated an increasingly fierce loyalty to the Union, the disunionists began to sense the unpopularity of their radical ideas. Rather than promoting nullification and secession, the latter group turned its attention toward advocating the call of a convention of South Carolina’s citizens to decide upon the best course. Although the Nullifiers believed a convention would be more palatable to the Unionist faction, opponents saw the convention as thinly veiled nullification doctrine.

The debate over immediate action versus patient forbearance reached a fever pitch as candidates stumped for state legislative offices in the fall of 1830. Each side accused the other of raising disunion excitement within the state and insisted its own method of redress was the only peaceable option. Meanwhile, the disunionists’ State Rights Party fractured over the issues of state sovereignty and convention, and a new party developed that encompassed the more moderate State Rights men as well as moderates and conservatives from other parties. This split
proved to be an important turning point. From the summer of 1828 until the 1830 fall elections, editorials could be categorized into three camps: those who saw the rights of the state as paramount and sought to protect them, even if it meant rebelling against the federal government; those who aimed to preserve the Union above all, even at risk of subjecting the state to measures they admitted were unjust; and those who upheld the state’s rights and Union equally, urging a moderate course until federal usurpations became so intolerable as to warrant drastic action. The latter two camps of editors combined, coinciding with the development of the state’s new political party.

The new party not only sealed the victory of tariff collector James Pringle over the nullifier and *Charleston Mercury* editor Henry Laurens Pinckney for the office of Charleston city intendant (mayor), but it likely also played a role in the outcome of the election for state legislators in districts throughout the state. In the newspapers as in the political arena, the goal of the combined moderate and conservative forces appeared to be quieting the radicals. Although the nullification papers tried their best throughout the campaign season to emphasize that their proposed modes of redress were peaceful, the damage already was done. Forceful language that had appeared in the nullification prints during 1828 and 1829 struck fear into the hearts of the people, and the fear was not of the national government assuming unlimited control as they had intended. The rampant disunionist talk early in the debate instigated panic that war and bloodshed were forthcoming. Moderate papers helped fuel that terror, to the point of winning Charleston votes for a man who enforced the very laws that the people had been disputing.

Although the nullification implications of a convention and the overzealous language of some of its supporters may have kept the State Rights Party from achieving the constitutional
majority required to call a convention in 1830, they still convinced enough voters of the dangers of Federalism that they took control of the state legislature and subsequently elected one of their most outspoken leaders, Pinckney, as Speaker of the House.

Convention opponents argued in 1830 that the American System was crumbling and that if South Carolina was patient, Congress would reduce or repeal the protective duties on imports that the state found so oppressive. When Congress did nothing to modify the tariff during the winter of 1831, the patience of the Free Trade Party (the unqualified resistance men of the former State Rights Party) ran out. That Congress heaped internal improvement and U.S. Bank measures atop the pile of American System legislation gave the Nullifiers even more cause to advocate immediate action.

Free Trade newspapers filled their columns with arguments in favor of nullification based on the patriotism of Revolutionary soldiers who did not want to see the Constitution they fought to establish destroyed, the doctrines of Republican forefathers James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, and the precedents set by other states who had effectively nullified the actions of the federal government from 1798 to 1831. The Nullifiers also elevated native son and Exposition author John C. Calhoun to hero status, particularly after he was vindicated in their eyes by controversial correspondence with President Andrew Jackson regarding the Seminole War.

As the rift grew between Calhoun and Jackson, so did a parallel gap between the Nullifiers and Unionists of South Carolina. The Union Party aimed to distance itself from what it perceived as revolutionary aims on the part of the Free Trade Party, planning its own Independence Day celebration and appointing its own delegates to an Anti-Tariff Convention planned to take place in Philadelphia in the fall of 1831. If the Union Party looked to ascend to domination, as some of the Free Trade papers speculated, its plan backfired in the wake of
correspondence between the Unionists and President Jackson, in which Jackson praised the Union Party and admonished the perceived disunionist aims of the Free Trade men.

The Free Trade Party became solidified in its opposition to Jackson and the Union Party, and the entire party found new enthusiasm for nullification. Throughout the summer and early fall of 1831, Free Trade meetings and the formation of Free Trade and State Rights Associations throughout the state—including formerly staunch Unionist districts—demonstrated that the party had gained tremendous strength, as did the election of full Free Trade tickets in Charleston and Abbeville’s city elections. The language of Free Trade advocates had become more moderate and their arguments had become clearer and more cohesive, whereas the Unionists simply continued to harp on disunionist tendencies that the Nullifiers successfully refuted. This along with the Union Party’s lack of organization and mobility may have led to its temporary downfall.

Following the Philadelphia Anti-Tariff Convention, however, nullification clamor cooled somewhat. The Convention, to which South Carolina sent several delegates from both parties, resolved to recommend that the president appoint one member from each of the fifteen states represented in the convention to a committee that would prepare a memorial to Congress on the tariff and ask for a modification that would make it equal in its operation on the different states. South Carolina’s legislature, on the advice of the governor, chose to wait and see how Congress responded to the Convention’s resolution before taking action.

Congress’s response was to pass a new act, which removed several duties and decreased some while increasing others. Unionist editors calculated the overall reduction to be several million dollars and believed that the decreases would continue until the system fell altogether. Free Trade men, on the other hand, found the Tariff of 1832 even more odious than the hated Tariff of 1828. They argued that the removals and reductions affected only the items not
produced in the United States, which were the only duties that the North and South paid equally. The new tariff left the entire burden upon the South, whether that burden was decreased or not. Free Trade newspapers declared that the state had no choice left but to resist, and that nullification was the rightful remedy.

The Union Party realized that the Free Trade Party had gained so much strength that nullification was imminent, and they tried various tactics to avoid it. At a meeting of Unionists from throughout the state in Columbia, they resolved to send delegates to visit the legislatures of the other southern states and solicit their participation in a Southern Convention. Free Trade men accused the Unionists of using the call for a Southern Convention as a means to delay action until the state had no choice but to submit to a tyrannical government. Framing the battle as a conflict between Federalists and Republicans, the Free Trade Party used the beloved names of Thomas Jefferson and John C. Calhoun to support their open call for a convention to nullify the tariff.

As it had in 1830, the convention became the issue on which South Carolina’s city and state elections turned. The outcome was entirely different, however. Not only did the Free Trade ticket carry the city election of Charleston as it had in 1831, but elections for legislators in a majority of the polling districts also resulted in an overwhelming Free Trade victory. With more than the constitutional majority necessary, the new legislators met in a controversial emergency session before the old legislature officially adjourned and called a convention, which ultimately passed an ordinance nullifying the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832.

Factions began to shift again after the federal government met the Ordinance of Nullification with hostility. Military preparations ordered by the governor and state legislature proved to the Unionists that nullification was not the peaceful remedy that the Free Trade men
had portrayed, and they implored the Nullifiers to rethink their course. Several Free Trade editors became alarmed at the true prospect for disunion as well. Although they praised the volunteers for stepping up to defend their native state, these moderate Free Trade editors hoped that military action would not be necessary and the Union would remain intact. The Charleston Mercury, on the other hand, returned to the same overzealous language that had marked the disunionist papers prior to the 1830 election. Its open hostility toward the federal government likely stemmed from the fact that the newspaper had come under the control of radical nullification leader Robert Barnwell Rhett.

A Compromise Tariff passed in Congress and the ensuing repeal of the Ordinance of Nullification ended the potential for armed conflict and punctuated the crisis for the Unionist editors, who stopped writing about the controversy and turned their attention to other subjects. Free Trade writers, however, argued that their quarrel with the federal government had only begun. The Force Bill passed the same day as the Compromise Tariff, giving the president the authority to coerce South Carolina into cooperation by military force, proved to them that the government wielded too much power and foreshadowed more conflict to come.

Partisan Newspapers’ Role in the Conflict

South Carolina’s Nullification Crisis occurred at a time in journalism history when people relied on print media for news and views, and when intense partisanship characterized the press. Nearly every newspaper served as the dedicated organ of a political party and made its duty promoting that party’s aims while attacking its opponents.

South Carolina had distinct political factions that battled not only for dominance in the city and state governments, but also for public opinion. The Free Trade Party aimed to convince
the people that the federal government had accumulated too much power, that the state had a
right and a duty to interpose in order to protect the Constitution, and that nullification was a
peaceful remedy to achieve that aim. Meanwhile, the Unionist Party sought to convey that the
federal government and its laws should be respected and obeyed, that the Union should be
preserved at all costs, and that nullification would be ruinous. South Carolina’s newspapers
played an integral role in the Nullification Controversy by disseminating the arguments of their
respective factions while refuting the claims of their opponents.

The purpose of this dissertation was to study editorials and correspondence in the state’s
partisan newspapers from the Congressional debate over the Tariff of 1828 until after the repeal
of the state’s Ordinance of Nullification to determine what the writers said during the state’s
nullification movement; where their ideas originated; and how those ideas came together to push
the state toward nullification.

**What did the writers say?**

Arguments in the newspapers centered on one main point: the relative rights and powers
of the federal and state governments as afforded by the Constitution. The overwhelming fear of
the State Rights/Free Trade Party was that the federal government would assume too much
power. These men argued that the Constitution limited the powers of the national branches of
government, leaving many rights reserved to what the Free Trade sect believed to be sovereign
states. Once the federal government overstepped the boundaries placed upon it by the
Constitution, it usurped the rights of the states and turned those glorious sovereigns into mere
colonial vassalages. According to the Free Trade editors, such a government would be a tyranny,
and anyone who advocated the assumption of such power under the federal head was a
consolidationist. If this occurred, the states not only had the natural authority to resist tyrannical
rule by nullifying laws that they deemed unconstitutional, but they had a duty to do so in order to protect the Constitution and the rights and liberty of the people. By legislating for the protection of individual branches of industry (such as manufacturing over commerce and agriculture) or for the benefit of one state or region over others, the Free Trade press argued that the federal government had lost interest in the general welfare and thus had violated the Constitution. Offending actions included not only the tariff, but also internal improvements, anti-slave measures, and attempts to establish branches of the U.S. Bank within the states. Because it drained the pockets of southern planters for the benefit of northern manufacturers, the tariff was the most odious of all and the one act that the Nullifiers targeted.

Unionist editors similarly held the Constitution sacred, but they had a different interpretation of the powers the national charter afforded to the national government versus the states. According to the Union Party, the states gave up certain rights when they ratified the Constitution. Unionists respected the federal government and its laws, even if some of those laws might be injurious to certain members of the population. If the states had veto power over every act Congress passed, the federal government would have no authority at all. Every measure would be subject to the approval of the states, and some state likely would veto each law, leaving the nation in chaos. The Constitution, the Unionists argued, allowed for Congress to pass laws without gaining permission of the states. It also allowed for a system of checks and balances such that the various branches of the federal government could judge constitutional infractions. The president had veto power over Congressional Acts, and the Supreme Court had the authority to judge laws unconstitutional and thus null and void. Even if the states did have the authority to interpose for the sake of righting Constitutional violations, the Unionists did not believe the tariff warranted such action. The Constitution allowed for Congress to enact duties
on foreign imports to raise revenue for the general welfare, and the Unionists argued that the protective tariff achieved that end. The duties protected industry in any state; if South Carolina had less industry than the northern states, that was the state’s fault. Furthermore, they posited that by increasing the demand for domestic goods, the tariff eventually would lower the prices of northern manufactures, and South Carolinians ultimately would pay less for their products.

**Where did the writers’ ideas originate?**

Being fiercely partisan, there is little doubt that the newspapers drew many of their ideas from the politicians they supported. The Unionists frequently cited Congressmen William Drayton and James Blair, Judge William Smith, and state Senator Alfred Huger. Free Trade editors virtually sainted Vice President/Congressman John C. Calhoun and drew much of their rhetoric from his work. They also often referred to Congressmen Robert Y. Hayne, George McDuffie, and Robert Barnwell Rhett, among others.

Their ideology had roots reaching much further back than the contemporary partisans, though. Both parties appealed to principles that guided the American Revolution. Free Trade activists recalled the patriots’ struggle against a tyrannical government that fixed oppressive taxes upon the people. They exalted revolutionaries who had been called traitors and disunionists in their day but whose fearless resistance against usurpation created a great nation where citizens could enjoy liberties known no where else in the world—liberties that the Nullifiers claimed were in danger. The Free Trade Party particularly glorified their state’s Revolutionary War hero, Gen. Thomas Sumter. Known throughout the state as the fighting Gamecock warrior, Sumter was a nullification adherent who penned letters cited often in the Free Trade papers. From all of these sources, the Nullifiers drew ideology related to the
necessity of protecting the liberty of the people against tyranny at all costs. Meanwhile, the Unionists held that the Revolutionaries already had won liberty, and it was in no danger. Union editors argued that the government the patriots bled to erect was too sacred to be torn apart by insurrectionists who falsely perceived it to be tyrannical.

Both parties also drew from the writings of the nation’s founding fathers. The Free Trade editors worshipped Thomas Jefferson, whom they labeled as the patriarch of the true Republican Party and of their nullification doctrine. They clung to his assertion that submitting to a government of unlimited power was worse than disunion. Although Free Trade men referred to several of Jefferson’s writings, they most often mentioned the Kentucky Resolution of 1799, which argued that when the federal government assumes powers within a state’s limits, the state has a natural right to nullify that power. Free Trade writers believed that James Madison also advocated the right to nullify, citing his Virginia Resolution of 1798 and its claims that the states are duty-bound to interpose when the federal government attempts to assume powers not granted by the Constitution. The Free Trade Party labeled Jefferson and Madison’s fight against the Federalist Party, particularly its Alien and Sedition Acts, as the second American Revolution. Partisans set up their entire conflict as one between Federalists and Republicans, equating themselves with the great Republicans, their leader Calhoun with the venerated Jefferson, and their opponents with the hated Federalists.

The Unionists also revered Jefferson and Madison and took offense at the Nullifiers adopting the statesmen as the fathers of their cause. Unionists cited letters by Madison which supported their claims that the Constitution did grant the federal government the authority to lay duties on imports for the general welfare. They also noted writings by Madison denying that individual states had the right to nullify federal laws. Similarly, they offered evidence that if
Jefferson had begotten the doctrine of nullification, he had reconsidered the policy and abandoned it in his later years. They posited that Jefferson considered the veto power of the states a fundamental defect of government, and that he believed it better to tolerate some errors in government than to dissolve it every time a dispute arose. Unionist writers also alluded to Benjamin Franklin’s belief that it was just and necessary to waive individual considerations for the general welfare, and to George Washington’s assertions that the Union was a great palladium of liberties that should be protected from dangers, whether coming from without or within.

**How did writers’ ideas come together to push the state toward nullification?**

That the partisan newspapers played a role in bringing about the Nullification Convention is certain. Editors’ allusions to their own importance aside (and they were numerous), that the most prominent editors from each party were elected to public office demonstrates the influence they had on their readers. Not only did the voters of Charleston elect *Mercury* editor Henry Laurens Pinckney intendant of their city repeatedly over the course of the controversy, but they also elected him to the state legislature, where his peers chose him as Speaker of the House. Furthermore, *Pendleton Messenger* editor Dr. Frederick W. Symmes and *Greenville Mountaineer* chief Benjamin F. Perry both were elected to represent their respective districts in the Nullification Convention.

Editorials and correspondence in newspapers from both parties demonstrate the peaks and valleys of the respective parties’ strength over the course of the controversy. At first, the parties were not well defined. Nonetheless, the disunionists obtained the upper hand as the tariff sent panic through the state, and they organized themselves at anti-tariff meetings. The disunionists gained strength when the “Exposition and Protest” validated their doctrines,
bringing the power not only of John C. Calhoun, but also of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to their cause. By the end of 1830, however, more and more South Carolinians became alarmed at the prospect of disunion as preached by the Nullification writers and accentuated by images of war and bloodshed projected by the Unionists. Loyal Unionist writers used their rhetoric to suppress the movement for a Nullification Convention, but just barely.

Once the Nullification writers dropped their overzealous disunion language and focused on sound Republican doctrine combined with patriotism reminiscent of the American Revolution, they became an unstoppable force. The Free Trade Party also was able to become highly organized, whereas the Unionists admittedly were not, and to disseminate their ideas via not only the newspapers, but also by tracts published and distributed through the aid of Free Trade and State Rights Associations statewide. Through their new, moderate rhetoric, Nullification writers were able to convince the public that they valued the Union as much as anyone, that the people’s rights and the Constitution itself were in danger, that the states had the authority to interpose in such a case, and that the rightful remedy of nullification, originated by the venerated founding fathers and upheld by South Carolina’s favorite son Calhoun, was the peaceful medium between submission to tyranny and outright revolution. Thus convinced, the people chose state legislators whom the newspapers told them would favor a convention, and elected convention delegates that they knew would vote for nullification.

In passing the Ordinance of Nullification, the state of South Carolina took a radical step. Although historically, other states had taken actions that the Free Trade Party argued to be virtual nullification, no state previously had officially nullified a law of the federal government. Given the unprecedented nature of the act, what it signified in terms of the relationship between the federal government and the states, and that no one could know what consequences it would have,
convincing the public to cast their ballots in favor of Nullification candidates was a tremendous undertaking. That the Free Trade newspapers of South Carolina played an integral part in swaying public opinion toward nullification doctrine clearly demonstrates the importance of the partisan press.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This research was limited by the restricted availability of newspaper material. Holdings are scattered, particularly for newspapers published during the first two years of the period under study. Obtaining complete runs of the major newspapers selected for study, let alone the few remaining extant copies of newspapers from smaller towns or rural areas, would require travel to more libraries and historical societies than time and resources permitted for this work. Future studies should encompass newspapers from Abbeville, Beaufort, Cheraw, Edgefield, Sumter, and Yorkville, as well as additional papers from Charleston, Columbia, Georgetown, and Lancaster, in order to provide a more complete picture of the views expressed throughout the state.

Furthermore, because the analysis focused purely on the newspaper content, it is impossible to obtain a full understanding of the writers’ motivations, particularly their reasons for supporting a particular political party. Archival research examining the papers of at least the more prominent newspaper editors would be helpful in this regard.

Finally, the Nullification Crisis encompasses only five years of South Carolina’s 42-year journey toward disunion. Analyses of newspaper editorials during the Missouri Compromise debates of the late 1810s and early 1820s, as well as from the repeal of the Ordinance of Nullification to the state’s secession in 1860, would offer a fuller picture of the ideology that led South Carolina to withdraw from the Union.
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