

Daniel Webster's Speech in Webster-Hayne debate

I have not allowed myself, sir to look beyond the Union, to see what might lie hidden in the dark recess behind. I have not coolly weighed the chances of preserving liberty, when the bonds that unite us together shall be broken asunder. I have not accustomed myself to hang over the precipice of disunion, to see whether, with my short sight, I can fathom the depth of the abyss below; nor could I regard him as a safe counselor, in the affairs of this Government, whose thoughts should be mainly bent on considering, not how the Union should be best preserved, but how tolerable might be the condition of the people, when it shall be broken up and destroyed.

While the Union lasts, we have high, exciting, gratifying prospects spread out before us for us and our children. Beyond that, I seek not to penetrate the veil. God grant that, in my day, at least, that curtain may not rise. God grant that, on my vision, never may be opened what lies behind. When my eyes shall be turned to behold, for the last time, the sun in heaven, may I not see him shining on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union; on States dissevered, discordant, belligerent; on a land rent with civil feuds, or drenched, it may be, in fraternal blood! Let their last feeble and lingering glance, rather, behold the gorgeous ensign of the Republic, now known and honored throughout the earth, still full high advanced, its arms and trophies streaming in their original luster, not a stripe erased or polluted, nor a single star obscured, bearing for its motto no such miserable interrogatory as, What is all this worth? Nor those other words of delusion and folly, Liberty first and Union afterward; but everywhere, spread all over in characters of living light, blazing on all its ample folds, as they float over the sea and over the land, and in every wind under the whole heavens, that other sentiment, dear to every true American heart - Liberty *and* Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!

Andrew Jackson on Nullification

December 1832

Andrew Jackson regarded the South Carolina Ordinance of Nullification of November 1832 as a clear threat to the federal union and to national authority. He reacted by submitting to Congress a Force Bill authorizing the use of federal troops in South Carolina, and by asking Secretary of State Edward Livingston to draw up the following "Proclamation to the People of South Carolina." Jackson's proclamation, delivered December 10, 1832, evoked a defiant response from South Carolina in the resolutions of December 20 that appear below. But support from other Southern states was not forthcoming, and this, coupled with Jackson's determination to employ military force if necessary, ultimately forced South Carolina to retreat. With the help of Henry Clay a moderate tariff bill more acceptable to South Carolina was passed in 1833. However, the episode had established a strategy the South would employ on the slavery issue, under weaker presidents, until the outbreak of the Civil War.

Source: Richardson, II, pp. 640-656. *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, Thomas Cooper, ed., Vol. 1, Columbia, 1836, pp. 356-357, as published in *The Annals of America*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., Volume 5, 1968, pp. 585-592.

.....I consider, then, the power to annul a law of the United States, assumed by one state, incompatible with the existence of the Union, contradicted expressly by the letter of the

Constitution, unauthorized by its spirit, inconsistent with every principle on which it was founded, and destructive of the great object for which it was formed.

...The next objection is that the laws in question operate unequally. This objection may be made with truth to every law that has been or can be passed. The wisdom of man never yet contrived a system of taxation that would operate with perfect equality. If the unequal operation of a law makes it unconstitutional, and if all laws of that description may be abrogated by any state for that cause, then indeed is the federal Constitution unworthy of the slightest effort for its presentation.

We have hitherto relied on it as the perpetual bond of our Union; we have received it as the work of the assembled wisdom of the nation; ... Were we mistaken, my countrymen, in attaching this importance to the Constitution of our country? . . .

...To say that any state may at pleasure secede from the Union is to say that the United States are not a nation, because it would be a solecism to contend that any part of a nation might dissolve its connection with the other parts, to their injury or ruin, without committing any offense. Secession, like any other revolutionary act, may be morally justified by the extremity of oppression; but to call it a constitutional right is confounding the meaning of terms, and can only be done through gross error or to deceive those who are willing to assert a right, but would pause before they made a revolution or incur the penalties consequent on a failure.

Because the Union was formed by a compact, it is said the parties to that compact may, when they feel themselves aggrieved, depart from it; but it is precisely because it is a compact that they cannot. A compact is an agreement or binding obligation..... An attempt by force of arms to destroy a government is an offense, by whatever means the constitutional compact may have been formed; and such government has the right by the law of self-defense to pass acts for punishing the offender, ...

... Men of the best intentions and soundest views may differ in their construction of some parts of the Constitution; but there are others on which dispassionate reflection can leave no doubt.

Of this nature appears to be the assumed right of secession. It rests, as we have seen, on the alleged undivided sovereignty of the states and on their having formed in this sovereign capacity a compact which is called the Constitution, from which, because they made it, they have the right to secede. Both of these positions are erroneous, and some of the arguments to prove them so have been anticipated.

The states have not retained their entire sovereignty. It has been shown that in becoming parts of a nation, not members of a league, they surrendered many of their essential parts of sovereignty. The right to make treaties, declare war, levy taxes, exercise exclusive judicial and legislative powers were all of them functions of sovereign power. The states, then, for all these important purposes, were no longer sovereign. The allegiance of their citizens was transferred, in the first instance, to the government of the United States; they became American citizens and owed obedience to the Constitution of the United States and to laws made in conformity with the powers it vested in Congress. . . .

Disunion by armed force is *treason*. Are you really ready to incur its guilt? If you are, on the heads of the instigators of the act be the dreadful consequences; on their heads be the dishonor, but on yours may fall the punishment. On your unhappy state will inevitably fall

all the evils of the conflict you force upon the government of your country. It cannot accede to the mad project of disunion, of which you would be the first victims. Its first magistrate cannot, if he would, avoid the performance of his duty. . . .