

CHAPTER 15

CALCULATING THE VALUE OF THE UNION

- I. The South Carolina Scene, 1820-1823
 - A. Introduction. In 1790, South Carolina, for the first time in nearly a century found itself with a white majority population. Many American's South Carolinians included, thought that slavery was a dying institution. Then came the cotton gin, the successful cultivation of upland cotton, and the expansion of plantation slavery south and west. The demand for slaves led South Carolina to reopen the external slave trade from 1804-1807. By 1820, the combination of white outmigration and massive slave importations resulted in the state's having a black majority once again. This unsettling statistic set the backdrop for a series of events that would eventually lead to a national crisis.
 - *B. The debate over the admission of Missouri raised the issue of slavery for the first time on a national level and angered South Carolina's leaders.**
 - C. Fear in South Carolina
 1. The General Assembly passed legislation forbidding manumission except with its approval and also forbidding the emigration of free blacks into the state.
 2. In June 1822, Charleston was swept with rumors that slaves were plotting to burn the city, kill all white inhabitants, and sail to Haiti.
 - a. Denmark Vesey, a free black, was accused of being the ringleader, tried, and hanged.
 - b. More than 100 others were placed on trial.
 - c. There still is doubt as to whether or not there was a plot.
 3. Charleston authorities ordered the African Methodist Episcopal Church closed and literally destroyed, because they did not want there to be a gathering place where free blacks and slaves could mingle without white supervision.
 4. The General Assembly passed two Seamen's Acts forbidding free black sailors to set foot in Charleston – if they did they would be put in jail.

D. Summary. With each passing year in the 19th century, South Carolina's leaders became more sensitive to attacks on the institution of slavery. Any perceived threat at home was taken care of swiftly and ruthlessly – as the Vesey affair had demonstrated. South Carolina's elite did not cotton to anyone, be they a Charleston free person of color or a United States Representative from New York, saying or doing anything that could be construed as a threat to their rule. One unforeseen ramification of the Seamen's Acts was that they helped accelerate the decline of the port of Charleston. This in the long run, hurt the state's economy and that was a real threat to the elite.

E. Readings

1. Edgar, South Carolina: A History, pp. 324-330
1. Blum, Catton, The National Experience, pp. 211-213
2. Horne, South Carolina, 234-238
2. Jones, South Carolina, pp. 386-388, 423-429
3. Lofton, Insurrection in South Carolina
4. Tindall, America, pp. 371-374, 561-660

II. John C. Calhoun And The Closed Society

A. Introduction. The debate over the admission of Missouri was the first round in what would become an increasingly bitter dispute between North and South over the issue of slavery. Internal conditions in South Carolina – the black majority, the Vesey Plot, and economic distress – caused the state's leaders to be among the first Southerners to leap to the defense of “the peculiar institution.” John C. Calhoun was the acknowledged spokesman not only for South Carolina, but also for the South.

B. John C. Calhoun, Part 1

1. He was a product of the Scots-Irish frontier in South Carolina.
- *2. His rise to national political prominence was swift—from freshman member of the House of Representatives in 1810 to Secretary of War in 1817.**

- *3. During his first 15 years in Washington, he was a firm believer in a strong federal government and was elected Vice President of the United States in 1824.
- *4. As conditions changed in South Carolina, he changed his political views to reflect the popular states rights beliefs of his constituents.

***C. The Tariff of 1828**

- *1. The passage of this tariff angered Southerners, especially planters, who felt that it hurt them economically.
- *2. Calhoun secretly authored a pamphlet, The South Carolina Exposition and Protest in which he denounced the tariff and set forth the doctrine of nullification.
- *3. The doctrine of nullification was the subject of the famous Hayne-Webster Debate.

***D. John C. Calhoun, Part 2**

- *1. In 1824, Calhoun had been reelected Vice President, this time serving under Andrew Jackson.
- *2. These two sons of the Scots-Irish South Carolina frontier openly espoused opposite interpretations of the authority of the federal government.

***E. The Nullification Controversy**

- *1. Congress had passed another tariff in 1832 which further angered South Carolinians.
- *2. In October 1832, the General Assembly called for “a convention of the people” to meet in Columbia to nullify the tariffs.
- *3. The Convention met and nullified the tariffs and challenged the United States government to do anything about it.
- *4. President Jackson responded by threatening to send an army to South Carolina to enforce the laws of the land.
- *5. South Carolina said it would meet force with force.

- *6. **No other state came to South Carolina's defense; her fellow Southern states denounced nullification and South Carolina's impetuosity.**
- *7. **In the midst of this crisis, Calhoun resigned from the vice presidency and was elected to the U.S. Senate.**
- *8. **Congressional leaders worked out the Compromise of 1833 and the threat of civil war disappeared.**

F. John C. Calhoun, Part 3

- 1. During Calhoun's later career he defended South Carolina and the South with vigor.
- 2. He was the first Southern politician to cease apologizing for slavery and to proclaim it "a good, a positive good."
- *3. **In his last speech to the Senate, he predicted the dissolution of the union if the agitation over slavery did not cease.**
- 4. He was one of the country's most original political thinkers as evidenced by his Disquisition on Government.
- 5. Calhoun often has been accused of destroying the union; this is not true. He wanted South Carolina and the South to remain in the union . . . but on their terms.
- 6. After his death, there was no Southern leader forceful enough to keep the hotheads in check.
- 7. Calhoun was an honest man and one of the giants of the United States Senate.

G. The Closed Society

- 1. Internally, South Carolina was divided over the issues of nullification between its supporters and unionists who supported the federal government.
- 2. Nullifiers got the upper hand in the General Assembly and hounded unionists out of public life.
- 3. Anyone or anything that threatened the established order in South Carolina was ruthlessly suppressed be it the U.S. Mail or an outspoken newspaper editor.

*H. **Summary. South Carolina's reaction to perceived internal and external threats to her way of life led to the Nullification Controversy**

and the Closed Society. Although the Compromise of 1833 kept the union together for another 27 years, it really was a prelude to civil war. The next time South Carolina challenged the power of the United States, she would not stand alone.

I. Readings

1. Edgar, South Carolina, Chapter 15
1. Blum, Catton, The National Experience, pp. 229-231, 233-237
2. Coit, John C. Calhoun
3. Edmunds, Francis W. Pickens, pp. 3-149
4. Ford, Origins of Southern Radicalism, pp. 281-307
5. Freehling, Prelude to Civil War
6. Horne, South Carolina, 238-244
7. Jones, South Carolina, pp. 386-402
8. Rogers, Charleston, pp. 141-166
9. Tindall, America, pp. 381-390, 392-403

III. Uniting South Carolina And The South

A. Introduction. Between 1834 and 1840, no Unionists were elected to public office. Then Calhoun decreed that the state must unite to defend its way of life against outside enemies. This was done, but between 1840 and 1860, South Carolinians debated among themselves as to the best course of action. How could they protect the South Carolina way of life? What was the best means of assuring that South Carolina would still be able to control its own destiny? Three different groups emerged; each had a different theory as to best protect and defend South Carolina and her institutions. Their methods may have differed, but on one thing they were united: South Carolina (and later the South) must be able to control its own internal affairs.

B. The Three Groups

1. The Unionists
 - a. They thought that the United States Constitution provided sufficient guarantees to protect South Carolina's way of life.

- b. They argued that remaining in the Union was the best way.
- 2. The Cooperationists
 - a. They wanted South Carolina to secede from the United States, but they did not want for the state to act by herself.
 - b. They remembered the Nullification Crisis when South Carolina stood alone.
 - c. They favored secession only if other Southern states cooperated in the formation of a new country.
- 3. The Radicals or Secessionists
 - a. These men were the heirs of the Nullifiers of 1832-1833.
 - b. They did not care whether other states cooperated or not and they had no faith in the Constitution or the United States.

***C. The Texas Question**

- *1. During the 1820s and 1830s, South Carolinians had joined hundreds of fellow Americans in migrating to Texas.**
- *2. William Travis of South Carolina commanded the Texas forces at the Alamo, the first battle in the Texans' successful struggle for independence.**
- *3. War with Mexico (1845-1848)**
 - *a. In 1845, after Texas had been annexed to the United States, border skirmishes erupted into a full scale war.**
 - *b. Calhoun opposed the war because he feared (correctly) that it would stir up controversy over slavery.**
 - *c. Once the war had begun, South Carolinians formed the Palmetto Regiment.**
 - *i. The regiment saw a great deal of action in Mexico.**
 - *ii. At the Battle of Chapultepec outside Mexico City, the Palmetto flag of South Carolina was the first one raised over the ramparts defending the Mexican capital.**
 - *iii. Of the 1019 men who had volunteered for duty, some 429 (43%) died from combat and disease.**
 - *iv. One of the most impressive monuments on the State House grounds is the Palmetto Monument**

erected in honor of the South Carolinians who fought in the Mexican War.

***D. The 1850s**

- *1. In his last speech to the U.S. Senate, Calhoun opposed the Compromise of 1850 because he saw it as a threat to the South.**
- *2. In 1851 in a special statewide election, South Carolinians voted not to take any separate state action at that time – a Cooperationist/Unionist victory.**
- *3. The Kansas-Nebraska Act opened up Kansas Territory to slavery.**
 - *a. The result was “Bleeding Kansas,” armed conflict between proslavery and antislavery forces.**
 - *b. An armed company of young men from Sumter District went to Kansas to support the proslavery settlers.**
 - *c. Senator Charles Sumner, in a U.S. Senate speech, attacked the proslavery “Crime against Kansas” and the character of Senator Andrew Pickens Butler of South Carolina.**
 - *d. One of South Carolina’s representatives, Preston Brooks, assaulted Senator Sumner with a cane and knocked him unconscious.**
 - *i. The assault was hailed in the South as a defense of Southern honor.**
 - *ii. In the North, “Bully Brooks” became synonymous with the evils of “the slave power.”**
- *4. The Dred Scott decision by the U.S. Supreme Court supported Southerners’ assertions that “slavery followed the flag;” that slavery was legal in all the territories and states.**
 - *a. The decision was a pyrrhic victory for the South.**
 - *b. It enraged Northern public opinion and converted thousands to the belief that there was a “slave conspiracy” trying to take over the country.**
- *5. John Brown’s Raid**
 - *a. Although the raid failed and Brown was hanged, he became a martyr to the cause of freedom in the North.**

***b. White Southerners were upset over the implications of Brown's raid.**

***i. They thought of Santa Domingo and shuddered.**

***ii. South Carolina with its 60% black population was especially fearful.**

***E. The Democrats in 1860**

***1. The Convention met in Charleston in May.**

***2. When radical Southerners could not get a platform plank espousing slavery as a positive good, they withdrew from the convention.**

***3. Efforts to patch up differences failed and there were two Democratic Candidates in 1860.**

***F. The Republicans nominated Lincoln.**

***G. Summary. With the Democrats divided and a third party, the Constitutional Unionist Party, in the race, Lincoln easily won the election. His election triggered a series of events in South Carolina and the South that reshaped the course of American history.**

H. Readings

1. Edgar, South Carolina, Chapter 15

1. Blum, Catton, The National Experience, pp. 286-295, 321-334

2. Channing, Crisis of Fear

3. Ford, Origins of Southern Radicalism, pp. 308-337

4. Horne, South Carolina, 244-246, 276-297

5. Jones, South Carolina, pp. 452-468

6. Lander, Reluctant Imperialists

7. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, pp. 78-233

8. Tindall, America, pp. 519-535, 578-612