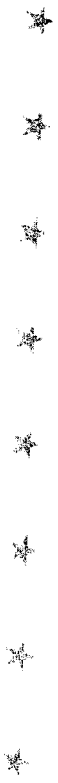


JOHN C.
CALHOUN



A Biography

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out, Van Buren, who feared that his great New York adversary De Witt Clinton might get the spot by default, managed to hold off the anti-Calhoun faction led by Crawford loyalists. By January 1828 Calhoun could boast of unanimous nominations in conventions in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, and Kentucky and a strong endorsement from Virginia. The "Jackson, Calhoun and Liberty" banner would carry the new Democratic Party to victory that fall, but the victory would be a costly one for both men.²⁷

The level of personal acrimony in the election of 1828 was nicely illustrated in April, when Russell Jarvis, a partner of Duff Green's and a Jackson partisan, assaulted President Adams's son and secretary by pulling his nose in the Capitol rotunda. Adams's supporters retaliated by calling Jackson a murderous brawler, a bloodthirsty "military chief-tain," a gambler, an adulterer, and the son of a prostitute mother and mulatto father. It was one of the most abusive campaigns in American history. Jackson won handily, and Calhoun, whose election as Vice President was practically uncontested, seemed to come off relatively unscathed. By his own lights he had turned a political scramble once again into a struggle over principle, and as the aging Jackson's political ally and Vice President he appeared to be the strongest contender for the presidency four years hence. There were people close to the President-elect, however, determined to preclude that possibility. "The former friends of Crawford here," wrote Alfred Balch from Nashville to Van Buren, "neither few in numbers nor weak in talents have an account to settle with Mr. Calhoun which must be settled."²⁸

The Architect of Nullification

BY 1828 CALHOUN could congratulate himself for having successfully negotiated the shoals of Adams's unpopular presidency while attaching himself to the invincible Jackson. He was still very much alive as a national leader and prospective President, but he had come to realize that he could no longer take the support of his home state for granted. Calhoun had been away from South Carolina most of the time for more than twelve years and had developed a national focus that was necessarily larger than the view from Abbeville, Columbia, and Charleston. His aggressive nationalism during the war had been consistent with the ardent patriotism of his native state, but the consensus at home for his expansive program of national improvements after the war had been flawed from the beginning. Carolinians were willing to support a strong military establishment because they knew they could not carry their staples to world markets except under the flag of a powerful nation, but they did not expect to benefit from internal improvements, and as historic free traders they instinctively opposed tariffs.

Calhoun's support for a substantial revenue-producing tariff in 1816 had derived logically from his plan for the army and a national communications system. Building the new nation required revenue, and taxing imports was the only avenue provided by the Constitution for that purpose, which, unfortunately, introduced a sticky problem. How could one be sure that duties levied on British manufacturers to provide money to build national roads and canals were not also helping protect the people in manufacturing states from foreign competition while raising prices for people in the South and making it more difficult for them to sell in foreign markets? Indeed, if this were the case, how could such legislation be valid under a Constitution which did not expressly authorize Congress to tax imports for the purpose of encour-

aging domestic manufactures? Such questions came naturally to the minds of Carolinians, who lived for the most part off their exports.

Knowing how apprehensive people in his state were to any kind of tariff, Calhoun had insisted that the 1816 bill was designed solely to produce revenue for defense, but he did not hide his opinion that it might encourage a more viable manufacturing sector and thus a stronger Union. In fact, the duties in 1816 were too low to be protective, and Carolinians supported them without significant complaint. In 1820, however, when a slightly higher tariff was proposed, they stoutly opposed it. South Carolina nationalism did not go that far.

The earliest indication of strain between Calhoun and his constituents came almost unnoticed when William Smith, a wealthy planter from York, was sent to the United States Senate by the South Carolina legislature in 1816. Twenty years older than Calhoun, Smith had been a fixture in state politics for more than ten years. Overcoming a notorious early career as a boozier, philanderer, and brawler, Smith had settled down after marriage and turned himself into a capable lawyer, legislator, and judge without completely surrendering his rough manners and a tendency to resolve political differences with his fists. For the most part, however, he was willing to delegate the latter function to his associate, James Blair, a hard-drinking 350-pound giant, who once ended a dispute by riding his horse through an opponent's house.¹

It was not likely that Calhoun would get along with a character like Smith, whom he had contemptuously dismissed in 1811 as a "weak political intriguer." Thus, as Benjamin Perry, editor of the influential *Greenville Mountaineer*, later recalled, when Smith entered the Senate, "He hated Calhoun with an intensity and cordiality seldom felt by any public man towards his opponent." Like Crawford, Smith was an old-fashioned states' rights, strict-construction republican, and his vehement denunciation of consolidation in the federal government and the ruinous effects for South Carolina planters of tariffs and extravagant expenditures for standing armies and internal improvements attracted a significant following, especially in upper country counties like York, Lancaster, and Chesterfield on the North Carolina border.²

For a proud man like Calhoun, who had grown accustomed to the increasingly deferential support of his native state, William Smith must have been hard to take. He did not go into the Senate to make Calhoun

President, Smith boasted, "but to do the duties of a Senator," and he interpreted these duties to mean painting the Secretary of War as an ambitious politician willing to connive with Federalists to get power. Clearly Smith had to go, and in 1822, when he stood for reelection, Calhoun and his supporters concentrated on getting the legislature to replace Smith with the handsome, well-bred Charleston lawyer Robert Hayne. The real issue was not so much the abilities of the two candidates as loyalty to Calhoun. "Let the Legislature remember," wrote the *Charleston City Gazette*, "that if Mr. Smith is elected, it will be considered as an evidence by all other states, that Carolina herself is unfavorable to Mr. Calhoun."³

Although Calhoun was successful in ousting Smith in 1822, the vote was reasonably close (91 to 74), and the Smith faction continued to challenge his control over the state by spreading the Crawford line about Calhoun's "impetuosity" in running for President and his recklessness in administering the War Department. When a Calhoun paper compared its candidate's decision to run for the presidency with Caesar's crossing the Rubicon, the *Yorkville Pioneer* jumped at the bait. "Caesar was a Republican too. . . . And like Mr. Calhoun to an extraordinary share of talent, he united an unconquerable thirst for distinction." Privately the combative Smith was considerably more explicit, calling Calhoun "a master spirit" of intrigue who "like the rat always quits the ship when he finds it about to sink. He has alternately abandoned and taken up Mr. Adams two or three times, and has at last taken up Adams and Jackson both." Calhoun's real goal, Smith told his friends, was to assure himself the vice presidency, force a runoff in the House for the presidency, "play that off till the 4th of March without producing a decision, and the Vice President becomes your President for the next four years. You may rely upon it that is the game he is now playing without Jackson or Adams suspecting him."⁴

Despite Calhoun's opposition, Smith proved a hard man to keep down. The Tariff of 1824, which raised duties considerably and coincided with the plunging price of cotton, was widely perceived in South Carolina as a victory for protectionists. Calhounites in Congress had been ineffectual in opposing the bill, and Smith quickly claimed that Calhoun had secretly supported it as a favor to northern friends. In the state elections that year Smith was returned to the legislature by a

heavy majority, and the next year he and his faction succeeded in passing resolutions declaring protective tariffs and internal improvements unconstitutional. By 1827 Smith was back in the United States Senate boasting to cronies that Calhoun had "lost his party both at home and abroad" and could never be reelected Vice President. "He [had] no offices to exchange for patronage, no large sums of money to disburse," Smith said, and consequently had lost his friends. According to Smith, South Carolina had remained true to the old republican doctrine of states' rights while Calhoun had been juggling regional and national interests for his own political aggrandizement. It was just a matter of time, Smith predicted, before the wayward son would be forced to recant. "He has not yet made his open avowal of his errors . . . but it is said if he had a fair opportunity of doing so, he would."⁵

Although Smith probably overestimated his own importance as a political mover and shaker and underestimated Calhoun's continuing influence nationally and at home, there was considerable truth in what he said. The political agenda in South Carolina was changing, and if Calhoun expected to control it in the future, an alliance with Jackson to undo the perfidy of the Clay-Adams coalition would not be enough. He would also need to find an argument and strategy to contain and direct the new political energy welling up in his native state over the tariff.

Although Calhoun ultimately became identified with constitutional arguments against the tariff, he did not need to consult the Constitution to learn why the tariff had become an inflammatory issue. Carolinians who supported the Tariff of 1816 had sold their cotton at twenty-seven cents a pound. In 1827 they were lucky to get nine cents a pound. "Our staples can hardly return the cost of cultivation," Calhoun wrote to his brother-in-law, "and land and Negroes have fallen to the lowest prices and can hardly be sold." The common perception, which Calhoun shared, was that the tariff was responsible. Reduced to its simplest essentials, the popular reasoning held that a tariff on manufactures forced a cotton-exporting state like South Carolina to "buy high" and "sell low." We know now that Calhoun and his supporters were wrong about the causes for economic decline in their state. Low cotton prices were linked more closely to overproduction brought on by the expansion of cotton cultivation in the Southwest than by tariff policy. However, the tariff explanation was plausible enough in the mid-1820s

to be politically powerful, especially when it was combined with the claim, supported by some economic historians today, that the tariff did, in fact, tend to redistribute income from cotton growers to economic producers outside the South.⁶

Calhoun made his first overt move against the tariff on February 28, 1827, when as presiding officer of the Senate he cast a tie-breaking vote to defeat a bill which would have raised the duty on woollens by 50 percent. Although he knew his action would offend supporters in the North and middle states, especially those in Pennsylvania, he really had no choice if he expected to hold on to his leadership position at home. By now antitariff sentiment had spread far beyond the Smith faction. McDuffie was denouncing tariff supporters as thunderously as he had put down the antinationalists a few years earlier, and on July 4, 1827, Thomas Cooper, the president of South Carolina College, delivered a widely publicized oration in Columbia challenging the value of a Union determined "to sacrifice the South to the North by converting us into colonies and tributaries." Cooper, whose intense commitment to Jeffersonian principles had earned him a jail sentence under the Alien and Sedition Acts, was not a man to be taken lightly, and the radical implications of his speech were spelled out in lurid detail in a series of newspaper essays by Robert J. Turnbull, a wealthy low-country planter. Tracing the crisis in 1827 to the tendency ever since the Monroe administration to extend the powers of Congress and the federal government under a loose construction of the general welfare clause of the Constitution, Turnbull warned that it would be suicidal for Carolinians to consider the protective tariff simply as a constitutional question. If Congress could pass such a tariff to promote the general welfare, what was to stop it from abolishing slavery for the same reason? Confronted by such a threat, South Carolina would have no recourse but to rely on "the undiminished sovereignty of our state—when the rights of one sovereign are invaded by another sovereign. There is no course but resistance. If resistance produced Disunion, let Disunion come." Let any reader mistake the implications of what he meant by resistance, Turnbull provided them with a chilling metaphor: "Fellow-Citizens. We are precisely in the situation of a family who have listened to, and overheard from their windows, the conversations of robbers in the streets, and, fortunately, know that its own dwelling is to be the scene

Handwritten note:
S. Land from opposition
to tariff = opposition
to anti-slavery

of their villainous operations. What is the course that prudence would dictate to that family? Certainly, to be prepared with blunderbuses, and to blow out their brains: so must it be with the tariff."⁷

Although Calhoun must have read Turnbull's *The Crisis* essays, he would have had little sympathy for their irresponsible rhetoric. He was sure Cooper and Turnbull did not represent the opinion of most Carolinians, but he also knew that the grievance in his state had substance. Explaining the issue to his brother-in-law, Calhoun said that wise men might differ over the question of a protective tariff, but there could be no doubt "that the power itself is dangerous and may be perverted to purposes most oppressive and unjust. Through such an exercise of it, one section of the country may really be made tributary to another." Convinced that the tariff placed an unequal burden on the South, Calhoun began to sharpen his public statements. "The Constitution of the United States intended for the protection and happiness of the whole," he said in a toast at an independence anniversary at Pendleton, "may it never be perverted into an instrument of monopoly and oppression."⁸

When the tariff advocates planned a meeting at Harrisburg, Calhoun denounced it in a letter to his Virginian friend Littleton Tazewell as an attempt on the part of "the great geographical Northern manufacturing interest in order to enforce more effectually the system of monopoly and extortion against the consuming states." If the manufacturers succeeded in electing the next President, Calhoun feared, "the simple alternative of submission or resistance will be presented." Confronted with this possibility, Turnbull had been willing to let the streets run red; Calhoun emphasized to Tazewell that he sought a more civil resolution of the problem: "a veto on the part of the local interests, or under our system on the part of the states." When Tazewell asked him how a state could void a law of Congress when that power had already been given to the Supreme Court, Calhoun admitted the difficulty and confessed "I do not see my way clearly."⁹

What Calhoun did see clearly at this point was the connection between the election of 1824 and the potential for tariff legislation in the future. He spelled out the message in a letter to the influential Postmaster General John McLean. In 1824 a President had been made in defiance of the popular will by "using the power and the patronage of

the government as the instrument of bribery." What had been done by individuals in the past now could be done by an economic interest group or section. "One section will be bribed by means flushed from another. The revenue collected from all will be partially distributed and the industry of a favorite section be promoted by the sacrifice" of one less powerful.¹⁰

The famous Tariff of Abominations, which forced Calhoun to systematize his case against the tariff in a hurry the following summer, resulted not from a conspiracy of one section against another but from an irresponsible bit of political chicanery in which all the sections shared. When the Twentieth Congress had met in December 1827, manufacturing lobbyists of every description, fortified by their discussions at Harrisburg that summer, showed up to get their slice of the great protective pie Congress was being pressured to bake.

The Adams-Clay coalition was clearly behind this movement, leaving the Jacksonians in a quandary. Their first priority was to elect their Hero (nobody was sure how he felt about the tariff), and that meant keeping the alliance of southern and middle state republicans intact. The ideal solution would have been to do nothing, always an appealing alternative. But there was too much of a clamor for that, so the Jackson managers decided on the next best option, which was to do so much that in the end it would come to nothing. The strategy of the Jackson men in the House was to accept the heavy duties recommended at Harrisburg, but to add a list of excessive levies on goods like hemp, iron, and molasses that would offend New Englanders. The assumption was that the bill would attract support from enough Representatives outside the South to pass the House but that New England Senators would kill it, thus laying the onus for the failed legislation on the section of the country where the administration was strongest. Artful, high-risk strategy, like fighting the devil with fire, warned George McDuffie, but Calhoun and the rest of the Carolinians went along with it to disaster. Everything proceeded according to plan in the House, where the bill passed in late April 1828 by an eleven-vote margin. In the Senate, however, the script was ignored as compensating amendments secured enough New England support to pass the law, and President Adams signed the famous Tariff of Abominations on May 19, raising duties generally from about 30 to 50 percent.¹¹

Powerless to intervene, Calhoun had watched the whole ugly business take place from his presiding chair in the Senate. South Carolina, where the tariff issue had become much more than a matter of simple economic self-interest, was hurt badly. The Carolina delegation cursed, caucused, and sought to enlist other southern states to make a formal remonstrance, but without effect. Having tried to fight the devil with fire and lost, most southern politicians were content to leave the issue alone, at least until after the election. Replacing Adams with Jackson, who they hoped would be more sympathetic to southern problems, was their first priority.

Calhoun's personal reaction to the Tariff of Abominations seems to have been moderate. Two days after the bill had passed in the Senate he wrote a sanguine letter to his friend Micah Sterling in New York expressing confidence in the political future and his own role in it. In the course of the letter he made the following statement:

I certainly have had great difficulties to contend with as you state, but truth will, in the long run, prevail. I have ever relied on it as my only guide under every difficulty—lead where it may I will follow. I know not that it is, even a merit in me: I cannot do otherwise. Whether it be too great confidence in my own opinion I cannot say, but what I think I see, I see with so much apparent [sic] clearness as not to leave me a choice to pursue any other course, which has always given me the impression that I acted under the force of destiny.¹²

Here Calhoun is trying to explain, incompletely but with considerably more self-insight than he usually revealed, the phenomenon others were to identify as a cast-iron character. However, he was not yet prepared to play the cast-iron role over the tariff because he was still groping for an answer to South Carolina's problem. He saw the injustice of the system clearly enough, but not the solution. He spent the next six months on his plantation, surrounded by desperate planters who looked to him for deliverance, searching for the answer.

Almost everything that Calhoun was to put into the paper that became known as the *South Carolina Exposition and Protest* and provided the theoretical basis for nullification appears somewhere in his correspondence during the summer and early fall of 1828. Calhoun knew that Jackson's election and his own that fall were a foregone conclusion. Although the voters in the state did not expect him to

campaign, they did expect him to provide leadership against the tariff and to help lead the new administration into the paths of righteousness in 1829 and beyond, a daunting prospect considering the divisiveness of the issue nationally, but one that appealed to Calhoun because it required rethinking the principles on which the government of the United States was based.

As Calhoun studied the question of the legitimacy of tariff legislation, he became convinced that there was "a fatal disease lurking in the system." The Founding Fathers had designed a government in which power would check power formally through the separation of the three great departments of the federal government and informally by providing for a representative form of government in a large, diverse country. James Madison had argued that the multiplicity and diversity of factions in the United States would invariably work to keep a factional majority from emerging and using the government for its own aggrandizement. But according to Calhoun, Madison's analysis did not hold up in the 1820s. "I greatly fear," he wrote to Monroe, "that the weak part of our system will be found to consist in the fact that in a country of such vast extent and diversity of interest many of the laws will be found to act unequally, and that some portions of the country may be enriched by legislation at the expense of others." In this situation parties would naturally develop to protect existing interests, and if a majority could be built around a common, favored interest, the Republic would be imperiled. Calhoun believed that the history of the mislabeled "American System" proved his point. "Mr. Adams and Mr. Clay never would have united," he wrote to Vandeventer, "but from the hope of sustaining themselves through this unequal action of the tariff system."¹³

Aware of the delicacy of his situation, Calhoun was careful to project a moderate image during the summer and fall of 1828. He was willing to agree, as he wrote to Samuel Smith in Baltimore, "that the tariff is to a certain extent constitutional, and that by a prudent exercise of the power really vested in Congress much good may result." What he meant was that the power to levy duties was always "incidental to that of raising revenue and commerce." In exercising either of these powers, Congress might also give preference to a measure calculated "to transfer manufacturing ability to our country." But, Calhoun in-

sisted, "when Congress converts the incident into the principal [*sic*] . . . it appears to be usurpation in its worst form."¹⁴

Although the republicanism which had informed both the Revolution and the writing of the Constitution had been born in reaction to the usurpation of power, Calhoun was trying to appeal to the reason of his friends, not to their passion. He wanted them to see that the differing economic interests of the sections were based on facts of history, geography, and population that were largely providential. Dependent on slave labor, the South probably could not turn to manufactures (thus enjoying the benefits of tariffs) even if it wanted to. And if it did, the Union would be sorely threatened. "Can we conceive a more dangerous political condition, than for free and slave labour to come into competition?" he asked McLean. "Do you think that the free laborers, the voters of the North, would permit bread to be taken out of the mouths of their wives and children by the slaves of the South?"¹⁵

In searching for a peaceful, constitutional way to redress the injustice done by the tariff, Calhoun rejected the idea of the Supreme Court as the ultimate arbiter of constitutionality and advised a return to the "primitive principles of our government," by which he meant a return to the principle of dual sovereignty—the separate states with their reserved powers and a United States with its delegated power. "Is not the result inevitable," he asked McLean on October 4, "that if the sovereign power be divided as between the General and State Governments neither can have the conclusive right of deciding on contested powers, and of course the acts of each is [*sic*] a negative on the other?" To expect the Supreme Court to decide the constitutionality of the tariff was inadequate because "It would not reach the danger. It presupposes that the evil to be guarded against is in those who exercise for the time the powers of the General Government, whereas it is in the *community itself*," the ability of the majority to enrich itself at the expense of the minority.

When McLean asked why the resort to state vetoes would not lead to anarchy, Calhoun reminded him that the ultimate power under the Constitution was the amending power. "Should a state abuse the power, it is in the power of Congress to call in the real creating power, that which made and that which can modify the Constitution of the General Government at pleasure, to correct the evil. I mean three-

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fours of the states." By now Calhoun had arrived at the kind of certainty he needed, a certainty which he had told Sterling, made him believe he acted "with the force of destiny." When a member of the South Carolina legislature called on him early in November to justify the right of their state to nullify or veto the Tariff of 1828, he was prepared.¹⁶

Calhoun wrote the draft for what became the historic *South Carolina Exposition and Protest* over a two-week period in November 1828. He did so with the understanding "that all that can be done at present is an able report, fully exposing our wrongs, and unfolding our remedies," and that the state would "*abstain for the present from applying it* on grounds of respect for others and a sense of moderation." The respect for others surely included himself. Even though his pen might write with the force of destiny, Calhoun must have realized how politically dangerous it was for an incumbent Vice President of the United States, about to be reelected to the same high office, to prepare a document defending the right of a state to nullify a federal law.¹⁷

Calhoun's report to the special committee of the South Carolina House of Representatives appointed to prepare a protest against the tariff takes up almost ninety pages in the Calhoun papers. For the most part it is a systematic presentation of arguments Calhoun had been making in correspondence over the past year. The first part is simply a restatement of the familiar complaints made about the invidious effects of the tariff on staple-exporting states in the South. "We export to import," Calhoun wrote, pointing out that the home market could consume less than one-fourth of what southern states could sell abroad. Since southern planters could not export their crops profitably, they faced the dismal alternatives of bankruptcy or shifting to manufacturing to take advantage of the tariff, and the latter was a practical impossibility. Even if it were possible, the North would never accept an industrialized South built on slavery. "Those who now make war on our gains, would then make it on our labour. They would not tolerate that . . . their rivals take bread out of the mouths of their wives and children." Here Calhoun was appealing to the self-interest of working-class voters outside the South, and he emphasized his point by arguing that the protective system which presently was impoverishing South Carolina and other southern states would ultimately do the same for workers

in the North. In Europe the war against free trade had always kept workers on the brink of starvation, and the same thing would happen in the United States. "After we are exhausted," he wrote, "the contest will be between the Capitalists and operators, for into these two classes it must ultimately divide society. . . . Under operation of the system, wages will sink more rapidly than the prices of the necessities of life, till the operators will be reduced to the lowest point, where the portion of the products of their labour left to them, will be barely necessary to preserve existence."¹⁸

According to Calhoun, the tariff threatened to destroy the Republic because it was an example of unchecked majority power, and republican government could never coexist with irresponsible power. "On this great principle," Calhoun wrote, "our political system rests." If all laws worked equally on citizens in different parts of the country, a simple representative system would suffice, but a critical problem would always be to prevent a self-interested majority from passing laws contrary to the minority interest. The founders knew that "no government, based on the naked principle that the majority ought to govern . . . ever preserved its liberty even for a single generation." They therefore divided power, not just in the famous separation of the three federal (Calhoun used the word "general") departments but between the individual states and the government they created.¹⁹

What powers adhered to the states and what to the general government? Where did sovereignty reside in the American constitutional system? These questions have never been easy to answer, and they were not easy for Calhoun. At one point he wrote: "Our system consists of two distinct and independent 'sovereignties' or 'governments.'" He was obviously grappling with those provisions in the Constitution which delegated specific powers to the federal government and reserved all other power to "the people of the several states who created it." Calhoun finally decided that neither the individual states nor the general government were sovereign. The ultimate power lay in any combination of three-quarters of the states for the purpose of amending the Constitution. The point to be stressed was that the Constitution recognized and institutionalized a basic reality about community in American life: "Looking to facts, the Constitution has formed the states into a community only to the extent that they have common

*Amendment process
- as prelude to
Constitution
amendment*

interests, leaving them distinct and independent communities, as to all other interests; drawing the line of separation as stated with consummate skill. It is manifest, that so long as this beautiful theory is adhered to in practice, the system, like the atmosphere will press substantially equally on all the parts."²⁰

The question of the moment was how the beautiful theory of the Constitution would be enforced. Calhoun quickly dismissed the notion that the Supreme Court, an arm of the general government, could be the final arbiter. The Court might usefully check the abuse of power on the part of the executive or legislature or the encroachment of state power upon the general government, but it could not be expected to judge in a case where the general government (of which the Court was a part) was accused of invading the power of a state. "The right of judging in such cases is an essential attribute of sovereignty, of which the states cannot be divested without losing their sovereignty itself, and being reduced to a subordinate corporate condition." To divide power and to give to one of the parties the exclusive "right of judging of the portion allotted to each" was really "not to divide at all." Every state, then, had the right to decide on "contested points of authority" between the general government and itself.²¹

Up to this point Calhoun was not saying anything new, a point which he made himself by citing the positions of Madison and Jefferson in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1798. He surely thought of himself as summarizing and putting in systematic form a way of thinking that had been common to South Carolina republicans ever since the Revolution and had been restated by Charles Pinckney in Congress in 1820, when he called the states "alert and faithful sentinels to disprove" unconstitutional acts of the federal government. Where Calhoun parted company with Pinckney and with the nullifiers of 1798 was in what he took to be the constitutional process through which an aggrieved state could act—not through its legislature but through a state convention chosen to determine whether or not a particular law or behavior was unconstitutional and should be vetoed.

Having rationalized more fully than anyone else the right of nullification, Calhoun was careful to end his report on a conciliatory note. This right of a state was neither revolutionary nor destabilizing and could never be exercised without cause.

The great number by whom it must be exercised of the people of a State, the solemnity of the mode, a convention especially called for the purpose, and representing the state in her highest capacity, the delay, the deliberation, are all calculated to allay excitement, to impress on the people a deep and solemn tone, highly favorable to calm investigation and decision. . . . The attitude in which the state would be placed in relation to other states, the force of public opinion. . . . The deep reverence for the General Government. . . . constitute impediments to the exercise of this high protective right of the State which must render it safe.²²

Closing with a rhetorical burst of praise for the fathers of the Constitution that Webster might have admired, Calhoun urged restraint on his fellow Carolinians. Although their case justified calling a state convention now, they should desist, hoping that "the great political revolution" about to take place would result in a "complete restoration of the pure principles of our Government."

Calhoun completed his draft of what became known as the *South Carolina Exposition* in late November and sent it to the Special Committee of the legislature, where it was reported in revised form on December 19. The legislature responded by sending a formal protest against the recent tariff to Congress and ordering four thousand copies of the *Exposition* to be printed. Although it was presented as a committee document, political insiders everywhere suspected that Calhoun had been the real author. Webster's protégé Edward Everett thought Calhoun was "working South Carolina into a frenzy on the tariff question" in order to seduce his old enemies the Crawfordites, while the well-placed Virginian William Rives thought he was ruining his political future: Calhoun himself was characteristically sanguine. "Our cause stands in principle and truth," he wrote to W. C. Preston shortly before transmitting his draft. "If well conducted on our part, it will form the greatest political era in our civil history."²³