

Primary Source

Speech on Nullification by Robert Y. Hayne

In December 1832, Robert Y. Hayne, having resigned his seat in the U. S. Senate, was inaugurated governor of South Carolina. Like his successor in the Senate, John C. Calhoun, Hayne was a proponent of the theory of nullification, which privileged the rights of individual states over the power of the federal government. Hayne had served as a member of the Nullification Convention that in November had voided within South Carolina federal laws taxing imports. In the excerpt below, taken from his December 13, 1832, inaugural address, Hayne seeks to justify South Carolina's bold step.

In the great struggle in which we are engaged for the preservation of our rights and liberties, it is my fixed determination to assert and uphold the sovereign authority of the State, and to enforce, by all the means that may be entrusted to my hands, her sovereign will. I recognize no allegiance as paramount to that which the citizens of South Carolina owe to the State of their birth

. . . . South Carolina, after ten years of unavailing petitions and remonstrances against a system of measures on the part of the Federal Government, which, in common with the other Southern States, she has repeatedly declared to be founded in usurpation, utterly subversive of the rights, and fatal to the prosperity of her people, has, in the face of the world, put herself upon her sovereignty, and made the solemn declaration that this system shall no longer be enforced within her limits. All hope of a redress of this grievance from a returning sense of justice on the part of our oppressors, or from any probable change in the policy of the Government, having fled, nothing was left for South Carolina but to throw herself upon her reserved rights, or to remain for ever in a condition of "colonial vassalage." She has therefore resolved to stand upon her rights; and it is for her sister States now to determine what is to be done in this emergency. She has announced to them her anxious desire that this controversy shall be amicably adjusted, either by a satisfactory modification of the tariff, or by a reference of the whole subject to a convention of all the States. Should neither of these reasonable propositions be acceded to, then she will feel herself justified before God and man, in firmly maintaining the

position she has assumed, until some other mode can be devised for the removal of the difficulty. South Carolina is anxiously desirous of living at peace with her brethren; she has not the remotest wish to dissolve the political bands which have connected her with the great American family of confederated States. With Thomas Jefferson, “she would regard the dissolution of our Union with them as one of the greatest of evils—but not the greatest: there is one greater—submission to a Government without limitation of powers;” and such a Government, she conscientiously believes, will be our portion, should the system against which she is now struggling, be finally established as the settled policy of the country.

South Carolina is solicitous to preserve the Constitution as our fathers framed it—according to its true spirit, intent, and meaning; but she is inflexibly determined never to surrender her reserved rights, nor to suffer the constitutional compact to be converted into an instrument for the oppression of her citizens.

Source: *Register of Debates in Congress . . . Second Session of the Twenty-Second Congress* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1833), Appendix, 176.