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WHY JOHN C. CALHOUN SWITCHED FROM
NATIONALISM TO SECTIONALISM

by

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P R E F A C E

The purpose of this paper is to present the several aspects of John Caldwell Calhoun's life that could have caused him to change, if he did change, from his intensely patriotic attitude of nationalism to an equally zealous sectionalist who was accused of leading his state and later the entire South into open rebellion against the nation he had hitherto so vehemently defended.

In viewing recent events it is difficult if not impossible to obtain the proper perspective. The impingement of protective tariff was possibly even more detrimental to the South in the early part of the nineteenth century than the taxes imposed by England upon the colonies had been in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

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Why John C. Calhoun Switched From Nationalism To Sectionalism

In recent years quite a number of writers have given conflicting versions of John C. Calhoun's apparent change from an ardent nationalist to a sectionalist who advocated that cause with equal fervor. In fact, some writers interpret his actions in such a manner as to declare that essentially his political viewpoints changed very little, if at all.

Margaret Coit describes him by saying that, " Basically Calhoun was at once a nationalist and a sectionalist from the beginning to the end of his career. In 1815 he represented a majority; by 1833 those who thought as he did were in the minority which explains where the difference lay." ¹

Charles M. Wiltse theorizes that Calhoun was first a nationalist, then a sectionalist, but, throughout his entire life, he always loved the Union. He further describes his later years in this manner:

Calhoun had become by 1840 a man with one fixed idea about which all else revolved. He would save the Union if he could, but first of all he

1

Margaret L. Coit, John C. Calhoun: American Portrait, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950), p. 104.
Hereinafter cited as Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait.

would save the South.... He arrived at the States Right position slowly and painfully over a long period of time, but he was there to stay for there and only there could his prophetic vision see safety for the South he loved, or for the Union which he loved equally well." 2

William E. Dodd makes this statement: " He (Calhoun) was a nationalist when South Carolina adhered to the same view; he became a particularist when South Carolina's interests were endangered; he was always a pro-slavery man because both his state and his section were pro-slavery." 3

William Meigs, thought to be one of Calhoun's best early biographers, felt that his change was a gradual process possibly beginning back in the early 1820's. He believed that Calhoun regretted his stand on the Missouri Compromise, even though he was only moderate in his views on the subject. Political aspirations kept him from expressing his feelings. According to Mr. Meigs in March 1823, Calhoun wrote,

2

Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun Sectionalist, (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Company, 1951) p. 22. Hereinafter cited as Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist.

3

William E. Dodd, Statesmen of the Old South, (New York: The McMillan Company, 1926), p.151. Hereinafter cited as Dodd, Statesmen.

" I stand on the great republican cause free alike
from the charges of federalism and radicalism."⁴

Frederick Jackson Turner felt that Calhoun's
whole career showed a desire to use a sectional balance
of power by welding the South and the West together.
He also describes him in this manner:

By far the greatest Southern statesman was
Calhoun. Fate might have made him a national
statesman, and, indeed, at the offset of his
political life that seemed to be his destiny.
But the hot blood of South Carolina, so ex-
clusively devoted to slavery and the cotton
interest that she occupied the exposed position
in the contest, compelled Calhoun, at the price
of his continued career to represent, first,
the interest of South Carolina, and then those
of the South as a whole, in opposition to the
rest of the country. 5

August 0. Spain seems to be more in agreement
with Meigs in his assumption that

While participating in the broils of practical
politics, he observed the movement of the main
stream resulting cumulatively from the meeting
of the small currents. He saw clearly the funda-
mental conflict of economic interest between
the North and the South, which Madison had feared
earlier and which John Quincy Adams had affirmed
in his own time. Following the Missouri Compromise
of 1820, Calhoun began to suspect antipathy to
slavery was to be made the cement for an alliance
of the North and West hostile to the South. To
meet the danger, it was not sufficient to employ

⁴ William M. Meigs, The Life of John C. Calhoun, I,
(New York: G.D.Stechert and Company, 1925), p. 296.
Hereinafter cited as Meigs, Life.

⁵ Frederick Jackson Turner, The United States, 1830-1850
(New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935), pp. 187-188.

the tactics of ordinary warfare. Calhoun set himself to the task of finding adequate means of self-protection for the South as a minority in the federal Union. 6

William Trent portrays him as:

The young Calhoun, then, was a Union man and a patriotic one. He claimed that he never ceased to be and in a certain sense his claim was true. But he gradually assumed the dreadful position of a mother who slowly poisons her child, thinking to save its life; now he was like a mother feeding her first-born. His sincerity and honesty are no less apparent first than last; although it is, perhaps, admissible to think that a desire to oppose the dominant Virginian school was to account in part for the rather lavish way in which the representatives of a proud and rising but still unimportant state gave his support to the old idea. 7

James Truslow Adams advances the theory that the change in Calhoun was abrupt. He mentioned the changes in such prominent men in state affairs as Judge William Smith, Henry L. Pinckney, Thomas Cooper, and George McDuffie, who had nothing to lose from their firm stand with South Carolina since their national ambitions would be futile. He seemed to think that the "Tariff of Abominations", so unpleasant to South Carolina, which

6 August O. Spain, The Political Theory of John C. Calhoun, (New York: Bookman Associates, 1951), p. 254.

7 William P. Trent, Southern Statesmen of the Old Regime, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Company, 1897), p. 161-162.

passed in 1828 caused Calhoun, along with Webster, to reverse his position. In comparing the changes of that period he had this to aver:

The most marked change, however, was that of John C. Calhoun who was now to evolve and fix the form of the Carolina doctrine of States Rights. So completely and suddenly did he shift from the opinions which he had been expressing in Congress that in the Life of himself which he wrote anonymously he completely suppressed all references to them. It is natural that a man should change some of his opinions as he becomes older and more experienced. Perpetual consistency is a sign of stubborn lack of thinking rather than intellectual virtue. It is impossible to reach down and grasp the motives of most men, far less a politician who has been stung by the desire for the Presidency.... Calhoun saw that if he did not join the radical wing of his party and remain a power in his State, he could never remain one in the nation and become President. 8

8

James Truslow Adams, America's Tragedy, (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1938), pp. 104-105. Hereinafter cited as Adams, America's Tragedy,

Chapter Two

A look into his background reveals that John C. Calhoun grew up in an environment of stern Calvinistic faith which placed an indelible stamp upon his future career.⁹ This is clearly portrayed in a letter during the declining years of his life which was written to his daughter Anna Maria Clemson dated March 7, 1848. He wrote her that, " Life is a struggle against evil, the reward is in the struggle more than in victory itself."¹⁰

In another incident the story is told of an ill-mannered traveler who refused to participate in family devotions. Calhoun ordered a servant to, " Saddle the man's horse and let him go."¹¹ To him there should be no compromise with moral standards.

Before he was five years old he would sit at his father's fireside and listen intently hour after hour to his tales of oppression in Scotland and Ireland, of his

9

Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, pp. 1-2.
See also Gerald M. Capers, John C. Calhoun- Opportunist,
(Gainsville: University of Florida Press, 1960)
pp. 7-8. Hereinafter cited as Capers, Calhoun- Opportunist.

10

J. Franklin Jameson, ed., in the Annual Report of
the American Historical Association for 1899, II,
pp. 744-745.

11

Mary Boykin Chesnut, A Diary From Dixie,
(New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1905), p. 16.

battles in the Revolutionary War, of Indian attacks on the frontier, one in which his grandmother lost her life in 1760, and of Tory atrocities. It is easy to understand that after these revelations of sufferings and heroism that he would develop some threads of bitterness¹² intermingled with his more amiable nature.

Calhoun's paternal grandparents were poor immigrants only a half century before the American Revolution. When he was very young his family owned only a few slaves, so he was no stranger to the difficult task of farm life on the frontier, yet, he was not quite fourteen when his father died after having become a relatively prosperous farmer. Only one other man in that district was credited with as many as thirty-one slaves which the 1790 census recorded him¹³ as having.

Christopher Hollis asserted that " his mind had been stamped into its pattern of life before it was

12 Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, pp.2-3. See also Capers, Calhoun-Opportunist, pp. 4-5

13 Wills of South Carolina, I, 37, in South Carolina Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia

touched with education. John learned to reason before he could read, and lived in his intellect because he had no library." ¹⁴ He was attending the school of his brother-in-law, the Reverend Moses Waddel, when the news of his father's death reached him. The grief caused by the death of his father and sister and the loneliness caused by the frequent absences of his brother-in-law, who was also an itinerant preacher, led the young boy to become extremely interested in the books found in the library of his brother-in-law. He read extensively in such volumes as Robertson's Charles V, and Voltaire's Charles XII. ¹⁵

A thread of inconsistencies in the traits which he inherited from his father can be easily traced. He fell heir to a wide range of prejudices. Probably the most outstanding was his father's prejudices against aristocrats, and yet, when he chose to marry he selected a bride who was among the truest of "blue-bloods". His

14

Christopher Hollis, The American Heresy,
(London: Sheed and Ward, 1931), p. 83.

15

Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, pp. 6-7. See also
Capers, Calhoun-Opportunist, p. 6.

father distrusted lawyers and inadvertantly handed this distrust down to his son, who spent a large share of the Calhoun estate after his father's death in training to become a lawyer. No one is able to predict how successful he might have become if the threats of war had not intervened and steered his course toward politics. ¹⁶

He was prejudiced against the eastern section of his state; the son later conspired against the northern section of his country. He also inherited the pure Jeffersonian doctrine from his father which, " He carried ... before him like a flag throughout his life; it was buried with him in his grave. It was a pioneer's dream of America." ¹⁷

Coit further states that "the primary legacy was a sturdy-fibered, independent mind unwilling to accept anyone's opinion but his own, arrived at by tortuous self-analysis and mental agitation." ¹⁸

16 Dodd, Statesmen, p.96. See also Capers, Calhoun*Opportunist pp. 5,11.

17 Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, pp. 5-6

18 Ibid.

His father had some characteristics that did not seem to dominate the mind of the younger Calhoun in the early part of his life but appeared later in very positive forms. His father was a loyal South Carolinian and strongly denounced the Constitution because he felt that no other people should have the right to tax his native state. In the beginning of his career the son was an advocate of stronger powers for the federal government such as the protective tariff and internal improvements; and he had held moderate views on the Missouri Compromise which, in his later years he deeply regretted. Also in the latter part of his life, he was able to accept his father's opinion that, " the best government was that which allowed the individual the most liberty."¹⁹

Martha Caldwell was responsible for her son's Huguenot descendency which was synonymous with Southern aristocracy. Thus his Irish looks, Scotch mind and his French love of freedom made him acceptable to the highest classes of society in his state. His mother was also

19

Anonymous, Life of John C. Calhoun,
(New York: Harpers, 1843), p. 5.

given credit for having taught him reverence for God and how to deal justly with his fellowmen. She was a patient audience when he wanted to expound upon his knowledge. This experience was a valuable asset in helping him to become an accomplished conversationalist. When the citizenry of the neighborhood began discussing John's love for learning and his potential abilities, it was his mother who called in the two older sons in the summer of 1800 to discuss the possibilities for his future education.²⁰

Calhoun would not accept the decision of his brothers to further enrich his educational background unless they would agree to his ultimatum. First, it was to be agreeable with his mother that the older boys should leave their businesses in Augusta and Charleston and come home and manage the plantation. Second, they were to supply funds to complete his education in the best school in the United States. The brothers accepted his terms and for the second time he entered the academy of his brother-in-law in preparation for his entrance into Yale.²¹

20

Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, pp. 7, 13. See also Caper, Calhoun-Opportunist, pp. 8-9.

21

Ibid., p. 13.

Calhoun entered Yale in 1802 with one of the largest classes in its history. His brilliance exceeded that of the other sixty-five members of his class. He became a leader in Phi Beta Kappa which not only required high scholastic ratings, but also, was considered to be the elite in social fraternities.²²

Literary societies clamored for his signatures on their rolls. Calhoun is believed to have been the only student that did not belong to either the 'Linonia' or the 'Brothers in Unity'. Both societies claimed that he had joined their societies forcing him to make a statement that he was not a member.²³

Margaret Coit very aptly describes his life at Yale:

He would neither absorb Yale or let himself be absorbed. He would not join the Moral Society. He would not join the Church of Christ. He would not even profess Christianity!...His heresies were not held against him....But his friends were compelled to accept him on his own terms. 24

²² Ibid., pp. 23-24.

²³ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

Calhoun was greatly impressed by Timothy Dwight, the President of Yale, but he was never afraid to discuss his viewpoints with him. Dwight was a bitter opponent of Thomas Jefferson. Much to the consternation of his fellow classmates Calhoun spent almost one whole class period defending the Jeffersonian theory of government. Dwight had nothing but admiration for the logical abilities of the young frontiersman and went so far as to predict that he might someday occupy the office of President of the United States. These words became a driving force in his political ambitions.

After graduating from Yale, Calhoun entered Litchfield Law School in 1805. At that time the citizens of Litchfield, Connecticut, were sure that the Republic was ready to crumble and fall, and they were standing by to pick up the pieces and build a new Federalist form of government. The activities in the law school were dominated by Federalist customs, but the daring Calhoun refused to conform. He flatly re-

25

Ibid., p. 29.

26

Ibid., p. 36.

fused to attend church, although, he was religious. Religion to him was a personal matter. He readily admitted that he gained knowledge from the town meetings while he saw paupers and debtors being sold while Negroes were being sold to the South.²⁷ His oratorical abilities exceeded that of his classmates while he was at Litchfield, but the principles that he learned there seemed to have the greatest influence upon him.

The startling fact is that every principle of secession or states' rights which Calhoun ever voiced can be traced right back to the thinking of intellectual New England in the early eighteen hundreds. Not the South, not slavery, but Yale College and Litchfield Law School made Calhoun a nullifier. In the little classroom, Reeves at white heat and Gould with cold logic argued the 'right' of secession as the only refuge for minorities. 28

27

Ibid., p.40.

28

Ibid., pp. 40-41.

Chapter Three

Calhoun entered politics at a crucial period in American history. Thomas Jefferson was just ending his second term as president. Some resistance had been built up in New England, such as the Essex Junto from Massachusetts and the "River Gods" from Connecticut, but the main troubles were built around the French and British sea power. It might seem ironical to say that Calhoun's political career began and ended in the form of a tragedy. He had just opened his law office in Abbeville, South Carolina, in the spring of 1807, when the United States frigate, the "Chesapeake" was fired upon by the British Man-of-War, the Leopard, causing intense anger on the part of the American people, particularly, the South and the West.²⁹ Calhoun evidently shared that same indignation for on June 22, 1807, the people of Abbeville asked him to draw up resolutions protesting the event. He prepared his speech carefully, dressed himself meticulously,³⁰ and gave his oration zealously.

29

Capers, Calhoun-Opportunist, p.22. See also Oliver P. Chitwood and Frank L. Owsley, A Short History of the American People, (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc. 1955), pp. 339, 343.

30

Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, p.46.

In 1810 he won the sympathy of the whole South on a platform of defiance to England and was elected to the United States Congress by an overwhelming majority over his anti-war Federalist opponent, General John A. Elmore.³¹ He became conspicuously associated with the "War Hawks", a group of young newcomers from the West and the South, which included Henry Clay of Kentucky, Felix Grundy of Tennessee, and from South Carolina along with Calhoun, came Langdon Cheves and William Lowndes. Clay appointed him to the Committee on Foreign Relations shortly after his arrival in Washington.³² While serving on this committee, Calhoun was given the opportunity to make his first national speech:

I know of only one principle to make a nation great, to produce in this country not the form but the real spirit of the union, and that is to protect every citizen in the lawful pursuit of his business. He will then feel that he is backed by his government; that its arm is his arm;... Protection and patriotism are reciprocal....The honor of a nation is its life. Deliberately to abandon it, is to commit an act of political suicide. 33

31 Capers, Calhoun-Opportunist, p.24.

32 Ibid., p. 29.

33 Works of John C. Calhoun, ed. Richard K. Cralle (New York: 1854-1857), II, pp. 5-7.

Madison did not feel that the country was ready for war and made a concerted effort to stall the proceedings, but with the insistence of the "War Hawks" and Clay's intimation that his renomination for President was dependent upon it, he reluctantly asked Congress to declare war on four grounds: " impressment, violation of the three-mile limit, paper-blockades, and the Orders in Council."³⁴ The House voted to declare war by a vote of seventy-nine to forty-nine, while a closer vote of nineteen to thirteen prevailed in the Senate. War was declared on June 18 the very day that the British Parliament had revoked the Orders in Council. Calhoun worked so enthusiastically in the following sessions of Congress that Alexander J. Dallas of Pennsylvania pointed him out as the " young Hercules who carried the war on his shoulders."³⁵ The Treaty of Ghent ended the war with very few accomplishments on either side. Both sides were ready to end the war with "peace without victory." The Battle of New Orleans, which was

34

Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, The Growth of the American Republic, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p.415. Hereinafter cited as Morison and Commager, Growth of American Republic.

35

Dictionary of American Biography, (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1929), III, p.412.

fought after the war had ended, was instrumental in helping Andrew Jackson in his later political aspirations to become President of the United States.³⁶

Calhoun assumed the role of an independent thinker and actor in 1816 when he placed nationalism before sectionalism and even South Carolina when he supported the bill to raise the Congressmen's pay from " six dollars a day to an annual salary of fifteen hundred a year."³⁷ He also advocated a protective tariff as a protection against foreign rivalry and the revenue derived from it could be used to defray the expenses of internal improvements to integrate the sections into a more perfect Union. His intentions were to assist the South in wooing the West as an ally so they could have a decided balance of power over New England and possibly prevent another occurrence of the Hartford Convention.³⁸

" It was at that time that Calhoun's genius as a leader of men and a political philosopher of the greatest importance became known to the country."³⁹ In the meantime Sputh

³⁶ Morison and Commager, History of the American Republic, p.426.

³⁷ Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, p. 117.

³⁸ Dodd, Statesmen, pp. 107-108.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 106.

Carolina was rebelling against both his action on the tariff and the increased salary of Congress. He could not afford to rescind his vote, and, in some manner, South Carolina re-elected him to his seat in the House. On January 31, 1816,⁴⁰ Calhoun delivered a speech to the House of Representatives declaring his stand on internal improvements. " Let us make great permanent roads; not like the Romans, with views of subjecting and ruling provinces, but for more honorable purposes of defence, and of connecting more closely the interests of various sections of this great country."⁴¹

He made another speech on April 6, 1816, in which he defended the New Tariff Bill. His carefully prepared argument was that it would enable the United States to become industrially independent from Europe and make a cemented alliance between the sections. Although he was at that time an ardent nationalist, he did not realize that, as a result of his actions pertaining to his philosophy, that South Carolina would blame her change from one of the most predominant to

40

Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, p.118.

41

Robert L. Meriweather, The Papers of John C. Calhoun, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959) p.326.

to a poverty-stricken state. He had unwittingly assumed that South Carolina would share in reaping the benefits from his untiring labors. There were two main factors that he did not take into consideration. First, the incompetence of managers and lack of capital in the South in regard to cotton manufacturing and, second, the inability of the New England manufacturers to control slave laborers. While the South was suffering from the excessively high prices, New England was growing richer as a result of the protective tariff. It is interesting to note that South Carolina's revolution from nationalism to states' rights took place during the period between 1820 and 1830.⁴²

The new states and the Middle States had been the chief supporters in passing the bill of 1816. The South opposed it by a majority of thirty-six to ten. Calhoun and Lowndes were successful in influencing only two Representatives from South Carolina to vote for the bill.⁴³ Two did not vote and three were openly opposed to the bill. By 1820 the manufacturers were clamoring for continued and increased protection, while the farmers, mainly from

⁴² Morison and Commager, Growth of the American Republic, p.475.

⁴³ Meigs, Life, I, pp. 188-189.

the South, were vehemently opposing it. When the new measure was introduced into the House of Representatives, it passed by a vote of ninety-one to eighty-three. The Senate, however, rejected the bill by a narrow margin of twenty-two against and twenty-one for. The sections were definitely formed. The South could be counted as vigorously opposing it; the Middle States and the West were its most ardent supporters, while New England was almost evenly divided.⁴⁴

Calhoun was not Monroe's first selection as Secretary of War in 1817. He wanted to fill his cabinet with representatives from each of the sections. He offered the position to Henry Clay, who declined the offer because he was so disappointed over the fact that he was not offered the position as Secretary of State. Shelby refused because of his age and Jackson had also given hints that he would refuse.⁴⁵ After he was chosen, Calhoun wasted no time in laying his plans before Congress. His first task was to create a board of officers to assist in the improvement of discipline in the Army. Fate seems

44

Charles S. Sydnor, The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819-1848, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948), V, pp. 140, 144. Hereinafter cited as Sydnor, Development of Southern Sectionalism.

45

Arthur Styron, The Cast-Iron Man, (New York: Longmans Green and Company, 1935), p. 96. Hereinafter cited as Styron, Cast-Iron Man.

to have played an unfair trick upon him, for because of his position in the War Department, it became his duty to pass judgment on Andrew Jackson's actions in chasing the Indians out of Georgia where he inadvertantly marched into Florida which was Spanish territory. Calhoun, eager to enforce his new policies, recommended that Jackson be reprimanded by the government, even though his action had resulted in the ultimate acquisition of Florida. He had not been forced to publicize his feelings, but in the peak of his political ambitions, it was artfully used against him in widening the rift between him and Jackson.⁴⁶

The Missouri Territory presented a petition to be admitted to statehood on November 16, 1818. An agreement on acceptance had not been reached before adjournment of that session of Congress. James Talmadge, Jr. brought the slavery question into American politics by his proposed amendment that forbade the " further introduction of slaves into the territory," and that, all children born after the State's admission would be free at the age of twenty-five."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Styron, Cast-Iron Man, pp. 98-99.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.101.

By March of 1820 the new members of Congress had increased the pro-slavery ranks, but they were still not strong enough to pass the bill without a compromise. As Secretary of War Calhoun was not forced to debate the issue. Adams deemed it a moral question and asked Congress to " legislate outright against slavery without compromise."⁴⁸ The Southern Congressmen refused to debate the morality of slavery and drew up their battle lines on the question of the Constitutionality of restricting the conditions upon which a state might enter the Union.⁴⁹ Those who favored the Tallmadge amendment began reading implied powers into the Constitution, while the opposing factions adhered to the strict construction policy and the rights of the states. The New England Federalists, who for the past two decades had been leaning toward the states rights theory, did an about face and developed nationalistic tendencies. The South had drifted into the states right fold.⁵⁰

48 Styron, Cast-Iron Man, p. 105.

49 Sydnor, Development of Southern Sectionalism, p.123.

50 Ibid., p.125.

Monroe called his cabinet in to discuss the issues at hand. All of the members seemed to agree that it was in the power of the Constitution to restrict slavery in a territory, but there was some question as to whether this would apply to the states that might be formed. Calhoun had a ready answer. He agreed with Monroe in the belief that there was no express authority in the Constitution, but that the implied powers were adequate.⁵¹ Since this furnished a way out of the dilemma, the entire cabinet voted that the Compromise be accepted. Calhoun did not realize that this moderate stand would be deeply regretted in the intervening years of his life.⁵²

The South became extremely self-conscious of the growing trend toward nationalism and began charting its course in the direction of sectionalism.⁵³ Calhoun tried to calm the turmoil and assuage the South by objecting to Monroe's second inaugural speech that expressed a desire to increase the protective tariff. He could clearly

51
Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, p. 147.

52
Ibid.

53
Sydner, Development of Southern Sectionalism. pp. 155-156.

see that his chances of becoming president in the future was dependent upon a closer relationship between the northern and southern parties and his alliance with strong nationalistic theories.⁵⁴

The "Era of Good Feeling" had left the country with only one political party.⁵⁵ Previously men had been nominated either by a party caucus, the state legislatures, or in public demonstrations by the citizens. Now for the first time there was an open field. As a result, six men from the ruling party became candidates for the Presidency. Henry Clay came from Kentucky, but was a Virginian by birth. Andrew Jackson hailed from Tennessee, but was a native South Carolinian. William H. Crawford came from Georgia. John C. Calhoun was from South Carolina. DeWitt Clinton withdrew, leaving John Quincy Adams from Massachusetts as the only candidate from the North. Adams was confident that he would carry both New England and New York, which would give him seventy-three electoral votes, while the eighty-eight Southern votes would be

54

Capers, Calhoun-Opportunist, pp. 72-73.

55

Morison and Commager, Growth of the American Republic, p. 432. See also Sydnor, Development of Southern Sectionalism, p. 157.

divided between the four men from the South.

Adams, Calhoun, and Clay were equally confident⁵⁷ that their platform would be successful. The newspapers began their scurrilous attacks. Clay was assailed because of his loose morals." Calhoun was dubbed as the " Army Candidate" with " loose principles." Andrew Jackson had numerous shortcomings, such as having been an atheist, a toper, an adulterer, and even a murderer. John Q. Adams had many indiscretions both public and private. He was even charged with having " walked barefooted to church." Crawford was described along with Calhoun as " two famished wolves grappling for the carcass of a sheep." The Washington Republican supported Calhoun, but bitterly opposed Crawford. His activities during the War of 1812 were questioned, but even more vicious were the accusations of the mishandling of federal funds while he was Secretary of the Treasury. The House of Representatives investigated and brought six more charges of misconduct against

56

Carl Schurz, Life of Henry Clay, Volume I, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915), pp. 221- 222. Hereinafter cited as Schurz, Life of Clay.

57

Styron, Cast-Iron Man, p. 115.

58

Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, p. 148.

Crawford. Even though no statistics were provided the impact had its desired effect on Crawford's popularity. ⁵⁹

Calhoun counted heavily on Pennsylvania for his endorsement since he had so strongly advocated the protective tariff, but Pennsylvania apparently adopted the policy of "wait and see". Monroe could not take a positive stand for Calhoun, but he found it very convenient to carry him along on his official visit along the Atlantic coast. With the pomp and royalty expected of the occasion, ⁶⁰ "the elite of Richmond met the War hawk of 1812."

Pennsylvania had waited and thought they had seen the handwriting on the wall. At the Philadelphia Convention in 1824 George M. Dallas supported Andrew Jackson. The odds hung so heavily against Calhoun that he withdrew and gracefully accepted the nomination for Vice-President. ⁶¹ For the first time his Presidential ambitions were thwarted.

Quite a few of the old traditions were broken by Jackson's nomination. First and probably the most glaring was the fact that he was not a statesman. He was subject to sudden fits of anger. His chief source of recognition was the fact that he was a military hero.

59 I.
Ibid., p.p. 150-151.

60
Ibid., pp. 151-152.

61 Styron, Cast Iron Man, p.116.

Another oddity about his nomination was the fact that he was nominated by the Federalists in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, only one month before the Democrats⁶² nominated him at the same place in March of 1824.

Crawford had reached the breaking point with Monroe in 1822 because he had refused to endorse him. In September, 1823, Crawford, while on a vacation, took an overdose of calomel and had a stroke. Although he was very ill his press following gave out reports that he was recovering rapidly. His rugged determination caused him to demand to be carried down the streets⁶³ bolstered by pillows to let the people know that he was still a candidate for the Presidency.

The Crawford followers decided to move rapidly by calling a "Congressional Caucus" to put him in the forefront. On the whole the call went unheeded. Only sixty-six of his friends ambled in and went through the motion of nominating him for President and Albert Gallatin for Vice-President. He received sixty-four of the seventy-eight votes, two by proxy, but it was

62

Schurz, Life of Clay, I, p.224.

63

J.E.D. Shipp, Giant Days: The Life and Times of William H. Crawford, (Americus Georgia: Americus Book Company, 1909), I, p.174.

a far cry from the total two hundred and sixteen votes.
That ended the caucus system of nominations.⁶⁴

Adam's qualifications ran high. Aside from the fact that he was New England's favorite son and the only available Northern candidate, he had a spotless private life and an innate ability as a statesman which answered the traditional requirements. He seemed to have the feeling that he would be doing the country a favor by becoming its president.⁶⁵

In the beginning Clay made no promises or bargains. His campaign consisted mainly of writing letters to his friends urging them to give him their support. Erroneous reports were given out that Clay had withdrawn and given his support to Adams.⁶⁶

Jackson was the idol of the vast majority of the people. He won ninety-nine electoral votes, Adams won eighty-four, Crawford won forty-one leaving Clay with only thirty-seven. Since none of the candidates won a clear majority the House of Representatives had

64

Schurz, Life of Henry Clay, p.224. See also John Bach Mc Masters, A History of the People of the United States, (New York:D. Appleton and Company,1924) p. 80. Hereinafter cited as Mc Masters, History of the People.

65

Schurz, Life of Henry Clay, I, p. 226.

66

Ibid., p.228.

to make the choice between the three which had received
the highest number of votes.⁶⁷ Jackson's supporters resort-
ed to trickery when they found that Clay was leaning to-
ward Adams, only to have their ruse " boomerang " shortly
before the election in the House. Clay gave full support
to Adams who received the majority of the votes. Calhoun
had been almost unanimously elected to the Vice-Presidency.⁶⁸
He cared little for the position except as a stepping
stone to his future political destiny. Now he had a decision
to make - Should he go along with Adams, or would his
political destiny be safer with Jackson? He was also faced
with the difficult task of leading the New Englanders to
believe that he had supported Adams and the Westerners
that he had given Jackson his support.⁶⁹ His political
enemies in South Carolina had a chance to punish him for
being so nationalistic. A great majority of the South
Carolinians were ready to disown him because of the stand
he had taken in supporting the bank, tariff and internal
improvements. In 1825 the South Carolina Legislature met
and adopted anti-bank, anti-internal improvement, and
anti-tariff resolutions.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 232.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 233.

⁶⁹ Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, p. 156.

⁷⁰ Sydnor, Development of Southern Sectionalism, p. 178.

Around 1827 it is believed that Martin Van Buren formed an alliance with Jackson and artfully placed Calhoun in a delicate position. The manufacturers had asked Congress to give further protection to woolens. England had shipped more raw wool to the United States and sold it at a low margin of profit. Daniel Webster presented the bill in the House of Representatives where it passed by a narrow margin of eleven votes. In the Senate a tie vote resulted. As Vice-President, Calhoun had an alternative. He could vote for the bill and retain his popularity as a nationalist, or he could vote against the bill and prevent further hostilities in South Carolina. He chose to redeem himself in South Carolina. Therefore, he cast the deciding vote to defeat the tariff bill. Van Buren had succeeded in forcing him to commit himself with South Carolina, who was now proclaiming her stand on states' rights.⁷¹ However, he still retained his popularity in Pennsylvania, and was considered a nationalist in that area because he did not renounce his beliefs on internal improvements.⁷²

71

Styron, The Cast-Iron Man, p. 115.

72

Dodd, Statesmen, p. 111.

Chapter Four

Crawford was too ill to offer any serious threat in politics in 1828, but, consequently, he devoted all of his energies toward preventing Calhoun from becoming Vice-President. In the winter of 1827-1828 a letter written by Monroe on September 9, 1818, was stolen from Calhoun's files by some of Crawford's followers. Monroe had openly blamed the Florida upheaval directly upon Spain for being so lax about the Treaty of 1795, and even though, he (Monroe) had tried to protect Jackson for his actions he secretly did not approve. They were able to gather from the contents of the letter that Calhoun had not approved.⁷³ This was quite a blow to Jackson since he had been one of the staunchest supporters in his defense.⁷⁴ After some bickering the conflict was seemingly appeased because Jackson's supporters were afraid that he would not be elected without the assistance of the Calhoun faction. Calhoun and Jackson ran on the same ticket. Van Buren had already realized that Jackson was the man to beat, but the radical forces were not going to be able to beat him, therefore, since

⁷³ Meigs, Life, I, p. 400.

⁷⁴ Capers, Calhoun-Opportunist, p.126.

he could not beat him he would join him. He carefully laid out his scheme to take Jackson's party into his fold, however, there were sharp economic deviations. The South bitterly opposed the protective tariff. Jackson had taken Calhoun into his fold to induce the South to assume that he favored tax reforms.⁷⁵ Pennsylvania and New York had supported Jackson which had far reaching effects in helping him receive about fifty-four per cent of the total popular vote.⁷⁶ Pennsylvania very strongly favored the protective tariff.⁷⁷ It is believed that Calhoun and Van Buren collaborated in revising a bill introduced by the Adams forces which would increase the taxes and possibly make Jackson take a stand on the tariff. They proposed a revision so repulsive that they thought New England that the New Englanders would vote against it. However, when the bill was presented, enough amendments had been added that the New Englanders accepted the revisions as better than nothing and the "Tariff of Abominations" became a law.⁷⁸

75

Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun, Nullifier, 1829-1839. (Indianapolis: The Bobbs Merrill Company, 1949), p.16.

76

Morison and Commager, Growth of the American Republic, p. 469

77 Dodd, Statesmen, p/ 113.

78

Capers, Calhoun-Opportunist, pp.105-106.

South Carolina threatened to revolt. The port at Charleston was going to refuse to pay customs. Calhoun was desperate. He knew that if South Carolina resisted it would be highly possible that the country would be split and thereby his chances of becoming President would be an absolute impossibility. At this point, Calhoun showed evidence that he had found some imperfections in the Constitution. He went along with Jackson and Van Buren in the campaign. To reconcile South Carolina it is believed that, in July, 1828, he began the famous "South Carolina Exposition and Protest", but chose to keep his identity within a small group of political friends.⁷⁹ His chief aim in writing the "Exposition" was to prove that the Constitution did not give Congress the power to give the protection to one section that worked such a hardship on another section.⁸⁰ He contended that the states became united by a compact between the states. The Constitution was merely the terms of the compact and it divided the powers between the states and the central government.⁸¹

79

Ibid., p. 107.

80 Frederic Bancroft, John C. Calhoun and the South Carolina Nullification Movement, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press 1928), pp. 35, 41.

81

Chitwood and Owsley, A Short History of the American People, pp. 439-440.

In the election of 1828 Jackson received 178 electoral votes while Adams won eighty-three. He carried every Southern state except Maryland who divided her votes giving six to Adams and five to Jackson. Calhoun fared almost as well as Jackson receiving 171 electoral votes.⁸² After a somewhat tumultuous inauguration and reception Jackson began the task of selecting his cabinet. Of course, his close friend, Martin Van Buren would become his Secretary of State, John H. Eaton, another close associate, would become the Secretary of War and William T. Barry of Kentucky was chosen as Postmaster General. The others were, or later became, staunch Calhoun followers.⁸³ Shortly after the new administration began, the two factions, which were labeled as Van Buren's and Calhoun's, drifted farther apart.⁸⁴ Jackson's followers in the cabinet, along with a few of his Western friends, seemed to be his advisors and were designated as the "Kitchen Cabinet".⁸⁵

⁸² Sydner, Development of Southern Sectionalism, pp. 193-194.

⁸³ Styron, Cast-Iron Man, pp. 140-142.

⁸⁴ Caper, Calhoun-Opportunist, p. 125.

⁸⁵ Styron, Cast-Iron Man, pp. 141-142.

Calhoun could now clearly see that he had played a vital role in the election of a man with a "narrow conception of democracy" and that "the time had come to unite not only South Carolina but the whole South ere its political power, based on a dwindling population, should wane, against the progress of a system that must eventually strangle its economic structure."⁸⁶

Jackson had supported Georgia in 1827 in the Cherokee Indian affair against the ruling of the Supreme Court. This action had led the South to assume that he favored states' rights, thus, they had given him their support in the preceding election.⁸⁷ They had fervently hoped that he would work toward a reduction in the tariff.⁸⁸

In 1829 the nullification controversy was raging in the Senate. The South was ardently wooing the West in order to maintain a more favorable balance of power over the North and reduce the unwanted tariff measures. The North was also courting the West with Clay's land distribution measure. The sectional balance of power was dependent upon party formation of the future.⁸⁹

86 Styron, Cast-Iron Man, p; 142.

87 Chitwood and Owsley, A Short History of the American People, p. 435.

88 Ibid., p.441. See also Morison and Commager, Growth of the American Republic, pp. 478-479.

89 Ibid., p. 479.

Calhoun could now logically reason that the "explicit understanding" he had had with Jackson that he (Jackson) would step down from his office and give his support to Calhoun in 1832 was rapidly waning in favor of Van Buren, but the rift could have been surmounted if Van Buren had not used the Eaton affair to rub salt into the wounds. On the eve of Jackson's inauguration Secretary Eaton and Mrs. Margaret O'Neal Timberlake were married and attended the inaugural ball only to be snubbed by Mrs. Calhoun and the other wives of the cabinet members. ⁹⁰ Mrs. Eaton was the widowed daughter of a Washington tavern keeper, whose morals did not appear to be above reproach. When Jackson learned that she had not been accepted, he called Calhoun in and asked him to see that Mrs. Calhoun returned a previous visit made by Mrs. Eaton. He not only refused, but he also advised Jackson not to approach her on the subject. When Jackson did not heed the Vice-President's warning, he was subtly introduced to an old Calhoun family tradition of being ⁹¹ shown to the door by a servant.

90

Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, p.198.

91

Ibid., pp. 199-200.

The Democrats customarily celebrated Jefferson's birthday on April thirteenth, an occasion in which they usually expressed their opinions with toasts. In 1830 the nullifiers, who were responsible for arranging the program, decided that this would be an appropriate time to force Jackson to reveal his beliefs about tariff and nullification, and if possible, induce his support. Lists⁹² of the toasts were placed on each plate. The Pennsylvania delegation saw the lists and departed because "three-fourths of the toasts were favorable to state-rights."⁹⁴ Van Buren had carefully assisted Jackson in the preparation of his toast, but they were so secretive about the contents that only one other person is reported to have known what it contained. At the elaborate feast tension built up. All of the attention was centered upon Jackson and Calhoun. Toastmaster Roane made his toast: "The President of the United States."⁹⁵

Looking squarely at Calhoun, Jackson replied:
"Our Federal Union: it must be preserved."⁹⁶

92

Asa Earl Martin, History of the United States, I,
(Boston: Ginn and Company, 1928), p. 381.

93

Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, p. 212.

94

Bancroft, Calhoun and South Carolina Nullification, p. 35.

95

Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, p. 212.

96

Ibid.

Calhoun responded, " The Union - next to our Liberty most dear. May we all remember that it can be preserved only by respecting the rights of States and distributing equally the benefit and the burthen of the Union."⁹⁷

98

Definitely this was an open break. Jackson had allied himself with the nullifiers and against the nullifiers. Calhoun had allowed himself to become a champion of states' rights. Coit compares the two in this manner:

Alike the two men assuredly were. They were alike in their blood and bearing, their reverence for women and children, their love of home and land; the very intensity with which they felt and thought. And their likenesses made them mortal enemies. They felt exactly the same way about entirely different things. Their patriotism - as each saw patriotism - and their adherence to principle regardless of personal consequences, brought them into headlong conflict. And neither could admit defeat. 99

Calhoun later resigned as Vice-President and became a Senator from South Carolina filling the place of Robert Y. Hayne, who had been selected as Governor of South Carolina. In his position in the Senate

97 Meigs, Life, I, p. 398.

98 Martin, History of the United States, p.390.

99 Coit, Calhoun: American Portrait, pp. 268-269.

Calhoun hoped to induce South Carolina to delay the ordinances of nullification until a satisfactory adjustment could be made. If this would not be possible, then he would use all the powers at his command in defending nullification.¹⁰⁰

Governor Haynes' inaugural address proclaimed the sovereign rights of the states and threatened to use military repulsion against the Federal Government in case it tried to make South Carolina pay the excessive tariff demanded by the new law. Jackson sent General Winfield Scott scurrying to Charleston a few days later, and clearly and loudly proclaimed to South Carolina that the doctrine of nullification was null and void. South Carolina began preparing to defend herself.¹⁰¹

Jackson's ire was about to reach the boiling point, yet, in March, 1833, Congress passed a bill which lowered the tariff and also a bill which would give him the authority to force South Carolina to pay tariff. One of the bills gave South Carolina some degree of success, while the other led Jackson to feel that he had been able to express his authority.¹⁰²

100

Styron, The Cast Iron Man, p. 194.

101

Adams, America's Tragedy, pp. 113-114.

102

Ibid., pp. 114-115.

By 1832 the sectional issues had divided the nation into three political parties. Jackson and Van Buren were the choices of the Democratic Party, and, in spite of, the Force Bill, Jackson's opposition to the bank, and the spoils system, Jackson came out victorious with 219 electoral votes. The National Republicans, later changed to Whigs, selected Henry Clay as their candidate. The platform was mainly Anti-Jackson. Clay was able to muster only forty-nine electoral votes. The Antimasonic party chose William Wirt, but Vermont was the only state it carried. The main accomplishment of the party was of taking votes from Clay and originating the national nominating convention.¹⁰³ South Carolina's vote went to John Floyd¹⁰⁴ of Virginia.

During the South Carolina nullification controversy, Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi were also having difficulties with the Federal government,¹⁰⁵ but they refused to accept the nullification theory. The Nullification Ordinance, having failed to gain the needed support, was withdrawn. At this point, if the

103

Chitwood and Owsley, A Short History of the American People, pp. 443-444.

104

Schurz, Life of Clay, I, p. 383.

105

Sydnor, Development of Southern Sectionalism, pp. 218-219.

slavery question had not again raised its ugly head, it is highly probable that Southern sectionalism would have waned and lived only as history in the thoughts of the American people.¹⁰⁶

During the remaining years of Calhoun's life he participated in various and sundry activities. He remained in the Senate and made a concerted effort to instill the States Right principles in the Democratic party.¹⁰⁷ He flirted with the Whigs, but he could not forget that he was a Jeffersonian Democrat.¹⁰⁸ He wielded a strong power in South Carolina and, in general, over the entire South. " If South Carolina sneezed when Calhoun took snuff it was because he always seemed to know the precise moment when a sneeze would clear the head."¹⁰⁹

Calhoun never ceased to worry about the welfare of the Union for on the very last day of his life he is reported to have made this remark to his son, " If I had my health and strength to devote one hour to my country in the Senate I could do more than in my whole life." 110

106

Ibid., p.222.

107

Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, p.24.

108

Ibid., pp. 18-19.

109

Ibid., p.51.

110

Styron, Cast-Iron Man, p. 355.

Conclusion

There seems to have been several factors which caused Calhoun's switch from nationalism to sectionalism. The candidate has attempted to list them in chronological steps.

First, his Calvinistic attitude of stern repression and struggle clung to him all of his life. He had great reverence for the Bible and often used it in arguments concerning slavery. He had grown up with slavery as a vital part of his environment.

Calhoun had married an aristocratic woman who refused to recognize a former barmaid as her equal, thus assisting in causing her husband's highest aspirations that of becoming president, to crumble and fall.

Calhoun entered politics at a time of high nationalistic feelings preceding the War of 1812. Even his beloved South Carolina did not change her nationalistic views until the early 1820's. He was only a few years behind.

Martin Van Buren, "the little magician", had contrived to place himself in a position on several occasions, to capitalize and further widen the rift between Calhoun and Jackson at a time when the alliance with Jackson was so dependent upon his future nomination for President.

Charles M. Wiltse declares the following:

The fact that Calhoun wrote the "Exposition and the Protest" proves that a great change was coming over him. Ten years earlier he was working to push the Federal government into new and broader fields of legislation and control; now he was penning a trenchant analysis of the unhappy results of expanding Federal power and of loose constitutional construction. While it is significant that he changed, perhaps it is more significant that he had taken so long to change.... Perhaps his mind worked slowly for all of its logical skill; perhaps he had a persistent faith in the essential goodness and unselfishness of mankind; perhaps his ambitions for high national office confused his thinking; or perhaps his conversion came earlier than he was willing to publish.

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