

Primary Source

Jackson's Proclamation on Nullification

In November 1832 South Carolinians meeting in Convention formally “nullified” federal laws taxing imports, on the grounds that they were unconstitutional and therefore not binding. South Carolina threatened to withdraw from the Union if the federal government attempted to coerce it into submission. Civil war seemed imminent: the state militia was called up, Charleston harbor was fortified, and the federal army was prepared to march on South Carolina. It was up to Jackson to resolve the crisis. Instead of reacting in anger, as he had so many times before, he wrote a “Proclamation,” a personal appeal directed to the people of South Carolina. He reminded them that the union was composed not of states, but of “the people.” The following excerpt is taken from the conclusion of the “Proclamation.”

Fellow-citizens of the United States, the threat of unhallowed disunion, the names of those once respected by whom it is uttered, the array of military force to support it, denote the approach of a crisis in our affairs on which the continuance of our unexampled prosperity, our political existence, and perhaps that of all free governments may depend. The conjuncture demanded a free, a full, and explicit enunciation, not only of my intentions, but of my principles of action; and as the claim was asserted of a right by a State to annul the laws of the Union, and even to secede from it at pleasure, a frank exposition of my opinions in relation to the origin and form of our Government and the construction I give to the instrument by which it was created seemed to be proper. Having the fullest confidence in the justness of the legal and constitutional opinion of my duties which has been expressed, I rely with equal confidence on your undivided support in my determination to execute the laws, to preserve the Union by all constitutional means, to arrest, if possible, by moderate and firm measures the necessity of a recourse to force; and if it be the will of Heaven that the recurrence of its primeval curse on man for the shedding of a brother's blood should fall upon our land, that it be not called down by any offensive act on the part of the United States.

Source: James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1896), vol. 2, pp. 655-656.