

NULLIFICATION

In the early 1800s, Congress passed several protective tariffs. A tariff is a tax on imported goods designed to keep out competition. The tariffs raised the price of goods sold in the United States. Because the South had so few factories and had to import most products, southerners were particularly hard hit by the tariffs and blamed the tariffs for their poor economy. John C. Calhoun, then vice president of the United States, had written in *The South Carolina Exposition* that a state could nullify (prevent the enforcement of) a federal law. Recognizing that the slave states would lose their power as time passed, Calhoun believed nullification provided a way for the South to protect slavery.

South Carolina challenged the enforcement of the tariff of 1832 and called for a special convention. The convention nullified the tariff and refused to collect any tariff taxes. The state also threatened to set up a separate government outside the Union—effectively seceding—if the federal government resorted to force. South Carolina found little support among the other southern states. A compromise settled the crisis. Congress passed a new tariff that gradually reduced the tariff duties to earlier rates. South Carolina repealed its nullification of the earlier tariff.

What is a tariff? Why was Congress passing them?

Why did the South believe nullification acts could protect their use of slavery?

What did South Carolina threaten to do if the tariff of 1832 was enforced?