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PAUL TO JEREMIAH: CALHOUN'S ABANDONMENT OF NATIONALISM

K.R. Constantine Gutzman*

The name “John C. Calhoun” is associated with a state-centered reading of the American Constitution of 1788. However, for the first fifteen years of his political career, Calhoun stood in the front rank of nationalist politicians. Over the course of his career, Calhoun abandoned nationalism for an emphasis upon states’ rights, then ultimately became an advocate of Southern regionalism.

This article will describe the series of events that launched John C. Calhoun down the path from apostle of nationalism to increasingly angry prophet (not to say advocate) of disunion.

THE BIG PICTURE

Calhoun’s political views, like those of many politicians of his generation, were formed by classical education in light of the War of 1812.¹ Having taken the lead in prompting Congress to declare war in that fateful year, Calhoun emerged from his nation’s travails convinced that American honor, prestige, and devotion to principle had been vindicated. However, the “Corrupt Bargain” leading to John Quincy Adams’s elevation to the presidency and Henry Clay’s appointment as secretary of state in 1825 was the first in a series of events that convinced Calhoun that something was rotten in the American polity. Seeing corruption in the general outline of the Ad-

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¹See, e.g., Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790–1820* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

ams-Clay policy, Calhoun began formulating his classic defense of states' rights.

Yet, many scholars trace the shift in Calhoun's constitutional stance to a reappraisal of his political prospects. South Carolina, they say, had abandoned its traditional nationalism in favor of an extreme localism, and Calhoun merely flapped like a shirt in the breeze. Therefore, before turning to an exploration of the reason for his change of posture, this essay first traces Calhoun's early political career, briefly exploring episodes in which the young Carolinian self-consciously bucked public opinion and set himself apart from the caricatures of him that now dominate the historiography. His understanding of himself as a man of principle, evident from his first appearance on the public stage, is the main evidence that his (mainly partisan) detractors have Calhoun wrong.

Within a few years of 1825, the Nullification Crisis helped establish the permanent radicalization of a certain portion of South Carolina's ruling elite. The constitutional arguments that Calhoun and his followers made then eventually formed the basis of Confederate constitutionalism.² Thus, Calhoun's decision to devote himself to defensive efforts on behalf of the South during that earlier period contributed to the coming of the war in 1861.

CALHOUN'S EARLY POLITICAL CAREER

Young Calhoun's was a Calvinist mind. In a letter to his cousin, Calhoun wrote that the "Yankees" he had encountered at Yale "are certainly more penurious, more contracted in their sentiments, and less social, than the Carolinians. But as to morality we must yield."³ Calhoun, in his twenties, made a point of noticing the moral climate wherever he went. The earnest seriousness that marked Calhoun in the prime of his political career, some thirty years later in the Jacksonian period, was already stamped clearly on his character in the years of Virginia's preeminence. In the tradition of his father, he

²See Marshall DeRosa, *The Confederate Constitution: An Inquiry into American Constitutionalism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), pp. 18–37.

³Calhoun to Andrew Pickens, Jr., May 23, 1803, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959), vol. 1, pp. 9–10.

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noted, “It is laid down as a maxim of prudence by many philosophers, that we ought always to make our pleasure act in subordination to our duties and obligations.”⁴

Along with his personal abstemiousness and quest to achieve stoic self-control, Calhoun nurtured a strong patriotism first evident after the H.M.S. *Leopard* attacked the American ship *Chesapeake* on June 22, 1807.⁵ The *Leopard*’s aim was to force the *Chesapeake* to submit to a search for British deserters (and thus, in all probability, to the impressment of some of its crew). When the *Chesapeake* did not yield, the *Leopard* resorted to force, an “act of war.”⁶ The result: continental outrage from which Pendleton, South Carolina, was not immune. The torrent of controversy that swept the country even had President Jefferson thinking of war.

One little-noted effect of the *Chesapeake-Leopard* incident was the appearance on the public stage of a figure who, for forty years to come, would be a leading Anglophobe force in American politics. When the large public meeting in Pendleton adjourned on August 3, 1807, Calhoun’s neighbors were stunned at his debut on the public stage.⁷ Young John had taken the lead in drafting the convocation’s statement, which said, in part,

We are urged by the torrent of our feelings, to give vent to an indignation deep and universal. Long Silence illy becomes those in whom the Sovereignty of the country ultimately resides. . . ; it would disgrace our character Abroad, and exhibit us a degenerate and pusillanimous people, instead of a nation glorying in its Independence, united by a common and enthusiastic Patriotism; and resolute, by a joint exertion of strength, to maintain the united and indivisible interest of our common country.⁸

⁴Calhoun to Andrew Pickens, Jr., June 25, 1805, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 13–14.

⁵This account is based on Dumas Malone, “The *Chesapeake* Affair,” chap. 23 in *Jefferson the President, Second Term, 1805–1809* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), pp. 415–38.

⁶Malone, *Jefferson the President*, p. 421.

⁷Irving H. Bartlett, *John C. Calhoun: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), p. 57.

⁸Calhoun, “Resolutions on the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair,” August 3, 1807, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 34–35.

The notion that national virility—the willingness to pursue a capacity for self-defense—was an essential component of republican virtue would be a prominent part of Calhoun’s thought throughout his career.

Election to the state legislature was young Calhoun’s reward. His most notable achievement as a state representative was chairing the committee which wrote universal white manhood suffrage into the state’s new constitution.⁹ That John C. Calhoun played the leading role in this provision’s adoption challenges some of the leading interpretations of his career. Beginning with Hermann E. von Holst’s 1899 biography, many historians have endeavored to fit Calhoun’s personality and career into some small niche; for von Holst, the one concept that explained Calhoun’s career after 1830 was slavery.¹⁰ The most eminent current advocate of such monothematic theses, William W. Freehling, has repeatedly characterized Calhoun as a committed “elitist,” each time basing his analysis on Calhoun’s systematic works of political philosophy, which were written in the last decade of the statesman’s life and published posthumously.¹¹ Attention to Calhoun’s career before 1830 yields another view.¹²

⁹John Niven, *John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), p. 30.

¹⁰Edward E. von Holst, *John C. Calhoun* (New York: Chelsea House, 1980).

¹¹William W. Freehling, “Spoilsmen and Interests in the Thought and Career of John C. Calhoun,” *Journal of American History* 52 (1965), pp. 25–42; William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816–1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965); and William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). In the first and third of these works, Freehling mentions the enactment of universal white manhood suffrage in South Carolina, but in each case omits Calhoun’s role in its adoption. See Freehling, “Spoilsmen and Interests in the Thought and Career of John C. Calhoun,” *passim*; *The Road to Disunion*, p. 591.

¹²While historians have long noted the obvious waning of Calhoun’s nationalism between 1817 and 1832, they have never pinned down the date or proximate cause of its diminution. For the latest example of a work which avoids this issue, see Lacy K. Ford, Jr., “Inventing the Concurrent Majority: Madison, Calhoun, and the Problem of Majoritarianism in American Political Thought,” *Journal of Southern History* 60, no. 1 (February 1994), pp. 19–58.

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In 1811, during his first congressional term, Calhoun wrote to a friend about his posture toward Carolina political opponents. They might attempt to undercut him, he said, but he would not relent in matters of principle:

All know that in the short time I have been in public service . . . I often advocated unpop[ular] questions. . . . I do trust that neither their censure, [n]or that of the whole community itself will ever drive me from the path of duty. I love just renown; but, to me undeserved popularity ha[s] no charms.¹³

Calhoun’s first major endeavor in the U.S. House of Representatives was his presentation of a Foreign Relations Committee report on the state of British-American relations.¹⁴ As the number two man on the committee, Calhoun played the dominant role in drafting the report, which rang with the same stout republican rhetoric as had the Pendleton remonstrance on the *Chesapeake-Leopard* affair four years earlier. “We must now tamely & quietly submit,” the reporter has Calhoun declaring,

or, we must resist, by those means which God has placed within our reach. Your committee would not cast a shade over the American name, by the expression of a doubt which branch of this alternative will be embraced. . . . [T]he national character . . . should be vindicated.

As if the rhetoric of “the committee” had not been persuasive enough, Calhoun closed by stating

That proud spirit of liberty & independence, which sustained our fathers in the successful assertion of their rights . . . is not yet sunk: The patriotic fire of the Revolution still burns in the American breast with a holy & unextinguishable flame. . . . The sovereignty and independence of these states, purchased and sanctified by the blood of our fathers, from whom we received them, not for ourselves only, but as the inheritance of posterity, are deliberately and systematically violated.¹⁵

¹³Calhoun to Dr. James MacBride, September 10, 1811, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 61–62.

¹⁴“Report on Relations with Great Britain,” November 29, 1811, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 63–69.

¹⁵“Report on Relations with Great Britain,” pp. 67–68.

In the fiery young congressman's speech, both the blood of the fathers and the rape of their legacy cried out for expiation.¹⁶ In order to show themselves worthy of their sires, he said, this generation must make war. President James Madison, it seems, had a legislative advocate for his war-related measures whose enthusiasm for the American effort would soon outstrip his own.

State sovereignty would become a recurrent theme in Calhoun's thought; in fact, his name has become nearly synonymous with the concept. Yet, in the period 1811–1817, Calhoun was in the broad middle on this question. The so-called "Old Republicans" whose cause was the Tenth Amendment plain and simple viewed him as a consolidationist.¹⁷ The Old Republicans simply misread him.

Calhoun enunciated his lifelong theory of federal-state relations while in the House of Representatives. On December 5, 1811, during his first year in Congress, Calhoun said, "it is the theory of our government . . . that liberty can only exist in a division of the sovereign power."¹⁸ Where he parted company with such colleagues as John Randolph was in the latter's denial that the federal government had any capacity for conducting an assertive foreign policy. In response to one of Randolph's harangues, Calhoun is reported to have said

It is not for the human tongue to instil the sense of independence and honor. . . . If [Randolph] means that this House ought at this stage of the proceeding, or any other, to enumerate such violations of our rights, as we

¹⁶This was a recurrent theme. See "Speech on the Albany Petition for Repeal of the Embargo," May 6, 1812, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 102–8; and, especially, "Speech on the Military Situation," October 25, 1814, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 254–59. In the latter, he argues that "It is the war of the Revolution revived—we are again struggling for our liberty and independence."

¹⁷On the "Old Republicans," see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "Keepers of the Jeffersonian Conscience," chap. 3 in *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948), pp. 18–29; and Norman Risjord, *The Old Republicans: Southern Conservatism in the Age of Jefferson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965). On Calhoun's tempestuous relationship with them, and especially with John Randolph of Roanoke, see *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1.

¹⁸"Speech on the Apportionment Bill," December 5, 1811, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 71–74.

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are willing to contend for, he prescribes a course, which neither good sense [n]or the usage of nations warrants. When we contend, let us contend for all our rights; the doubtful and the certain; the unimportant and essential.¹⁹

When Randolph responded that the nation would not willingly pay for war on the scale that Calhoun’s policy must entail, Calhoun countered, “Sir, I here enter my solemn protest against this low and ‘calculating avarice’ entering this hall of legislation. . . . True courage regards only the cause . . . and . . . despises the pain of war.”²⁰

The personal animosity between Randolph and Calhoun is evident here; Randolph’s partisan characterizations of Calhoun’s policy apparently created the myth of a difference between the early “nationalist” Calhoun and the later advocate of states’ rights.²¹ Also evident, though, is Calhoun’s view of public virtue, which involves willingness to sacrifice oneself and to serve in the military.²²

That Randolph grew to resent Calhoun should not surprise, for Calhoun employed the most derogatory rhetoric in their encounters. One interesting exchange involved the famous “Principles of ’98,” which were the touchstone of the Old Republicans, and which would one day become the key to Calhoun’s mature political theory. In an 1813 debate over an administration request for increased manpower, Randolph explicitly based his opposition on the Principles of ’98. They could be summarized, the Virginian said, in two principles: opposition to the general government in favor of the states, and opposition to the general government in contests with individuals. He closed

¹⁹“Speech on the Report of the Foreign Relations Committee,” December 12, 1811, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 75–85.

²⁰*The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 75–85.

²¹The notion of a radical divergence between early and late Calhoun can be seen in many surveys of the Jacksonian era, such as Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), and in some of the Calhoun biographies, such as Gerald Capers, *John C. Calhoun: Opportunist—A Reappraisal* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960).

²²Calhoun repeated this point in his “Second Speech on the Military Academies Bill,” January 3, 1816, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 289–90. For Calhoun’s willingness to serve, see Calhoun to Patrick Noble, March 22, 1812, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 95–96.

his speech with an encomium to George Washington.

The South Carolinian heaped scorn upon the former House majority leader. Washington's "whole life," Calhoun said, "indicated the strongest leaning on the side of the government of his country," so Randolph was being wildly inconsistent. Additionally, Calhoun said that if the Principles of '98 were as Randolph characterized them, Randolph's adherence to them disqualified him from any position in the Executive. "Trust the government to those who are hostile to it! Who prefer their own interest and rights, to its interest and rights!" The opposition had "the love of present ease and enjoyment, the love of gain, and party zeal" on its side. "These," he said, "constitute part of the weakness of our nature." In other words, the opposition's motives ran counter to those of the virtuous; the task of the majority was "to elevate the minds of the people, and to call up all of those qualities by which present sacrifices are made to secure future good."²³

Calhoun was convinced that his was the more virtuous policy, and he equated it with that of "our government and country." While the Old Republicans' siren song of frugal government might continue, 1813 found Calhoun sure his side would prevail. Even as the war went badly, he expressed confidence that the people and their government would stay the course: "The intelligence, the virtue and the tone of publick sentiment are too great in this country to permit its freedom to be destroyed by either domestick or foreign foes."²⁴

The war, we must understand, had positive effects beyond the mere maintenance of national self-respect. For instance, Calhoun was extremely pleased with the war's collateral economic effect: promotion of domestic industry. He told the House,

We must . . . rejoice at the acquisition of those national qualities necessary to meet the vicissitude of war when

²³"Speech on the Bill for an Additional Military Force," January 14, 1813, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 150–61.

²⁴Calhoun to Dr. James Macbride, June 23, 1813, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 177–78. The equation of his position with that of "the country," of his views with those of Americans generally, is found throughout the extant correspondence from the war years. This marks Calhoun as a typical Jeffersonian. See K.R. Constantine Gutzman, "Old Dominion, New Republic: Making Virginia Republican, 1776–1840" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1999), chap. 5.

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made unavoidable. Connected with this subject, I rejoice to behold the amazing growth of our manufacturing interest. . . . It will more than indemnify the country for all of its losses. I believe no country . . . can acquire a state of great and permanent wealth, without the aid of manufactories.²⁵

In the end, Calhoun considered the war a “complete success.” He was proud to be “of a party which drew the sword on [impressment], and succeeded in the contest.”²⁶ More important than the end of impressment—which, objectively, is difficult to attribute to the American war effort—even more important than the marshalling of American industrial resources, was the national feeling the war had aroused:

Now, we see everywhere a nationality of feeling; we hear sentiments from every part of the House in favor of union, and against a sectional spirit. What had produced this change? The glory acquired by the late war, and the prosperity which had followed it.²⁷

Calhoun’s war aims obviously had been different from those of the Madison administration, for whom the War of 1812 represented a monstrous debacle.²⁸ The War Hawk from Pendleton had been less concerned with such geostrategic goals as the acquisition of Canadian territory than with establishing his country’s maturity and independence. In that limited sense, his opinion that the war had been a success was shared by large numbers of his countrymen.

With the war’s end, Calhoun, like his contemporaries, was free to ruminate on the nature of the Union and its peacetime political economy. Picking up a theme he had enunciated in his 1811 debate

²⁵“Speech on the Loan Bill,” February 25, 1814, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, p. 238.

²⁶“Speech on the Results of the War,” February 27, 1815, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, p. 282.

²⁷“First Speech on the Military Academies Bill,” January 2, 1816, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, p. 288.

²⁸See J.C.A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983); and Ralph Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970).

with Randolph, Calhoun argued that the strictly limited delegation of power to the center was ideal, giving Congress all powers that were necessary, but none that would be pernicious.²⁹ As to political economy, Calhoun remained at loggerheads with the Old Republicans. The government's wartime financial system should be retained, he asserted, and even strengthened by the addition of a new Bank of the United States, until a system of fortifications and internal communications (to be financed with assistance from Calhoun's Bonus Bill) was completed. This, he declared, would render the United States impervious to likely British depredations.³⁰ Besides that, the tariff should provide some minor protection for "certain manufactures in cotton and woolens" to fund those programs.³¹

In 1816, Calhoun had been reelected to the House only after facing down substantial opposition in his district to his vote in support of a congressional pay raise.³² Other congressmen had advised him to downplay his vociferous support for the measure, or even to change his position. However, to have done so would have been untrue both to Calhoun's image in his district, where he was seen as "republican virtue incarnate,"³³ and to his self-image as a man who was uninterested in being popular without being right. The measure, in Calhoun's opinion, would keep higher quality men in the House for more than one or two terms, which made it a "highly republican" measure.³⁴ While only one-third of the sitting House members were reelected, Calhoun, who had publicly defended his vote, was among them. His colleagues rescinded the pay raise shortly thereafter, but

²⁹*The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, p. 311.

³⁰"Speech on the Additional Revenue Report," January 20, 1816, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 314–15, and "Speech on the Revenue Bill," January 31, 1816, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1. For South Carolinians' postwar willingness to sacrifice their personal interests to the common good of the United States, see Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, pp. 91–96.

³¹"Speech on Compensation of Members," March 8, 1816, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 343–45.

³²Calhoun to Alex J. Dallas, June 15, 1816, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 361–62.

³³Niven, *John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union*, p. 55.

³⁴"Speech on the Compensation of Members," March 8, 1816, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, pp. 343–45.

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not before even old opponents commended Calhoun’s disinterested (virtuous) stand.³⁵

President Madison’s veto of Calhoun’s Bonus Bill seems to have negated the best opportunity for any antebellum Congress to put all sections of the country on convergent paths of economic development. For Calhoun, the Bonus Bill promised to put off the advent of parochial politics; he thought a centrally directed program of internal improvements could strengthen the country militarily and, at the same time, counteract the centrifugal tendencies so much in evidence during the war.³⁶

CALHOUN IN THE MONROE CABINET

Calhoun’s political economy changed not a whit during his tenure as President James Monroe’s Secretary of War. Serving the Virginian, whom he much admired (and would admire ever after), Calhoun did what he could to ensure that the new American republic would enter any future conflict with Great Britain—he thought there would be another, probably sooner rather than later—in a state of high preparedness. The fortifications and transportation network he had endorsed as the young lion from South Carolina were now his personal responsibility, and Secretary Calhoun made the most of the opportunity.³⁷

Yet, although he was devoted to the task of ensuring that Americans guarded their fathers’ legacy militarily, he continued to insist that the Constitution be read correctly. In an 1824 letter to his Commander-in-Chief, Calhoun explained his long-held position on internal improvements. The Constitution did not empower the federal

³⁵Niven, *John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union*, p. 55. Calhoun long remained convinced that raising the pay of congressmen was good policy. See Calhoun to John G. Jackson, March 31, 1818, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 2, pp. 216–17.

³⁶John L. Larson, “‘Bind the Republic Together’: The National Union and the Struggle for a System of Internal Improvements,” *Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (September 1987), pp. 363–87.

³⁷Congressman Calhoun had said, “Let us conquer space.” Secretary of War Calhoun’s army did so. He even mounted a horse and scouted out a route for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal himself. See *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 9, pp. xliv, xlvi–xlvii.

government to engage in intrastate internal improvements (for example, the building of roads), so, he argued, those must be left to the states. The general government should support internal improvements “which may bind all the parts together and the whole with the centre.”³⁸

The most important controversy of the Monroe administration concerned Missouri’s admission to the Union. When a New York congressman proposed an amendment denying Missouri the right to decide for itself whether it would have slavery, Monroe had a ready explanation: Northern leaders, hungry for power after Virginia’s long domination, wanted a party issue.³⁹

The controversy adversely affected Union sentiment in the South and West. Calhoun prided himself on his role in fostering Union feeling; to him, such adverse sentiment was so bad a result that an immediate end to the controversy was of paramount importance.⁴⁰ Thus, from Calhoun, who shared Monroe’s appraisal,⁴¹ came only moderation.

In fact, Calhoun foresaw that this issue might be fatal to the Union, for continued controversy might convince the slave-holding states that “it [was] the intention of the other States gradually to undermine their property in their slaves and that a disunion [was] the *only* means to avert the evil.”⁴² His disapproval of hothead behavior on both sides was evident when he wrote to his kinsman, John Ewing Calhoun,

I still hope, that Missouri will be admitted before the end of the session; and that a question, which has so deeply agitated this country will be settled forever. Both sides

³⁸Calhoun to James Monroe, December 3, 1824, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 9, pp. 421–29.

³⁹George Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952), p. 229.

⁴⁰Calhoun to Andrew Jackson, June 1, 1820, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 4, pp. 164–65.

⁴¹Calhoun to Samuel Ingham, December 17, 1820, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 4, pp. 500–2.

⁴²Calhoun to Virgil Maxcy, August 12, 1820, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 4, pp. 327–28, emphasis in original.

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ism
have moderated very much.⁴³

In the wake of the Missouri controversy, Calhoun believed that the issue had been put to rest permanently, and he insisted that those Southerners who saw the beginning of a great sectional conflict were mistaken. Few Northerners desired such a struggle, and they were geographically concentrated. A sectional orientation would be counterproductive for the South, he knew, for if the North encountered systematic sectional opposition, “they must from necessity resort to a similar opposition to us. Our true system is to . . . advance the general interest.” Yet, he feared some Southerners’ continued agitation.⁴⁴ The Missouri controversy thus left Calhoun firmly in the Union camp. The federal Constitution, understood as federal rather than national, had his devoted support then, as it would throughout his career.

CALHOUN’S PRESIDENTIAL PROSPECTS

From our vantage point, it seems clear that Calhoun never had a serious chance of election to the presidency in 1824, but his perspective was somewhat different. Of the major candidates, only he and Henry Clay had gone on record in support of internal improvements, and, as Calhoun wrote to his friend and political operative Virgil Maxcy, the West could be expected to support internal improvements, while his election promised to marshal the support of recalcitrant Southerners.⁴⁵ Calhoun’s appeal was straightforward: the memory of his role in the much-celebrated War of 1812, coupled with his promise of internal improvements and his reputation as a proper republican, seemed to Calhoun to augur success.

The South Carolina legislature’s nomination of a different favorite son, though, was a serious blow to Calhoun’s candidacy, leaving him reliant on the outcome in the Pennsylvania legislature. Subsequently, Calhoun was shocked when the growing Jackson phenomenon carried the general to victory in Pennsylvania. As to the balance of the

⁴³Calhoun to John Ewing Colhoun, January 8, 1821, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 4, pp. 540–41.

⁴⁴Calhoun to Charles Trist, October 26, 1820, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 4, pp. 412–14.

⁴⁵Calhoun to Virgil Maxcy, September 17, 1823, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 3, pp. 271–72.

campaign, he told friends elsewhere to remember that the means of elevation were as important as the elevation itself.⁴⁶ There would be no perseverance in hope of winning in the House after an Electoral College deadlock.

Bowing to the inevitable, Calhoun withdrew from the five-man contest and set his sights on the number two office. If the caucus system were destroyed, the vice presidency would acquire its own lustre; he would accept it in that event, but he would not accept it as a caucus nominee, thus a party creature.⁴⁷ His main goals were the perpetuation of the Monroe administration's policies⁴⁸ and the defeat of the caucus system in the person of Georgia's William Crawford, the Secretary of the Treasury and nominee of the Republican congressional caucus.⁴⁹

Since he had long tormented their champion, John Randolph, the states' rights school in Virginia was skeptical of elevating Calhoun to the vice presidency. He seemed to them the very archetype of consolidationism, a sort of Federalist constitutionalist in Republican guise. In the face of such an important opposition element, the young Carolinian could be sanguine neither about his chances in 1824 nor about his future prospects: in a word, no Southerner could win the presidency without the support of Virginia. Calhoun therefore explained his career to a member of that Richmond clique, Robert S. Garnett.

If there is one part of the Constitution, which I most admire, it is the distribution of power between the State and General government[s]. It is the only portion, that is novel and peculiar . . . and I consider it to be the greatest improvement, which has been made in the science of government, after the division of power into Legislative, Executive and judicial.

In such a large area as the United States, he pointed out, a govern-

⁴⁶Calhoun to Rev. Jedediah Morse, April 15, 1824, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 9, pp. 34–35.

⁴⁷Calhoun to Lewis Cass, April 24, 1824, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 9, pp. 49–51.

⁴⁸*The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 9, p. li.

⁴⁹Calhoun to Lewis Cass, April 24, 1824, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 9, pp. 49–51.

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ism

ment wholly national, if it were effective, would possess such patronage and power that it must eventuate in tyranny.⁵⁰

In obvious reference to his feud with Randolph, Calhoun told Garnett that he did not believe it was proper merely to oppose the general government in every case of friction, for to do so would surely bring the rights of the states into disrepute. Rather, the intended form of federalism, the carefully considered allocation of powers to the general government and retention of the residuum by the states, was Calhoun’s lodestar. The implication is clear: Randolph was so opposed to the central government’s exercise of power that he had strayed from the people’s will as expressed in the ratification process. Virginians had been misled, for Calhoun had always been a proponent of states’ rights—states’ rights properly understood, that is.⁵¹

Calhoun was certain from an early date that Crawford would be defeated.⁵² Also apparent was that the South Carolinian would be elected vice president. What he, like his fellow citizens, did not know, though, was who would succeed Monroe in the chief magistracy. None of the candidates won an Electoral College majority, so the top three vote-getters went into a runoff in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Speaker of the House Henry Clay had placed fourth, behind Jackson, John Quincy Adams, and Crawford, in that order. Each state’s delegation had one vote. Rumors were in the air. The outcome, the House’s elevation of Adams, came as an enormous surprise to Calhoun. “Things,” he wrote to Virgil Maxcy, “have taken a strange turn. . . . I wish to see you much, so that you may clearly understand the present extraordinary and important crisis.”⁵³

“THE CORRUPT BARGAIN”

⁵⁰Calhoun to Robert S. Garnett, July 3, 1824, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 9, pp. 198–202.

⁵¹*The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 9, p. 199.

⁵²Calhoun to Joseph G. Swift, July 20, 1824, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 9, pp. 235–36.

⁵³Calhoun to Virgil Maxcy, February 18, 1825, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 9, p. 570.

In February of 1825, John C. Calhoun, as Secretary of War and vice president-elect, was a known commodity in American politics with several hard-earned traits of political character which would remain with him throughout his career. First, he was convinced that the United States must have a sufficient military to fend off potential aggressors. Great Britain could be expected periodically to renew its aggression against the former colonies, and vigilant republicans must be prepared. Second, he contended that the Constitution's federalism must be respected, yielding neither to states' rights extremism nor to the growing centripetal forces. Only the central government could perform the functions delegated to it, and it should perform only those.

A statesman, believed young Calhoun, should be disinterested. Monetary considerations must not drive his policy, and he must speak the truth to the public, heedless of whether he thought they would agree. Further, the proper American politician had to bear in mind that every liberty he enjoyed was part of his patrimony, and that he owed it to his fathers to pass on the legacy intact to his sons.

The War of 1812 had, as Calhoun saw it, established that his was the majority position. Americans had rejected the temptation to take the easy way out. Randolph had consistently confronted the public with the cost of Calhoun's war policy, but the public had not been swayed. It had seen the conflict through to what Calhoun considered a gloriously successful conclusion. Whatever the Old Republicans might say, Americans were as selfless as Calhoun's ideal statesman, and Calhoun was thrilled by the young republic's progress. America was virtuous, and Calhoun was an American.

It was against this backdrop that Calhoun viewed the "Corrupt Bargain."⁵⁴ While we cannot know if an agreement by Speaker Clay,

⁵⁴In the 1824 presidential election, Andrew Jackson received the most popular votes and the most electoral votes, but he did not have a majority of either. Thus, the race was thrown into the House of Representatives, presided over by Speaker Henry Clay. The House chose John Quincy Adams over Jackson, and Adams named Clay Secretary of State. Jackson accused Clay and Adams of engaging in a corrupt bargain.

Clay lived under the shadow of that event for the rest of his life, and Adams implied that he intensely resented the imputation of corruption. *The Diary of John Quincy Adams, Adams Papers* (Massachusetts Historical Society, microfilm, reel 8, roll 39), includes a newspaper article "extracted from

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a Kentuckian, to sway his fellows in exchange for the office of Secretary of State was what led Kentucky to vote for Adams,⁵⁵ we can chart the effects on the politics of John C. Calhoun.

Calhoun interpreted the ascension of Adams, followed as it immediately was by Clay’s appointment as Secretary of State, as a gross departure from the example of James Monroe, whom Calhoun saw as a pillar of rectitude. Monroe would never have subverted the will of the people and bought the presidency. The outgoing president had devoted his life to public service, and penury awaited him. This, from Calhoun’s point of view, was pristine (American) republicanism. As he had pointed out to Morse, the election should never have been thrown into the House in the first place, for disinterested (virtuous) also-rans would have withdrawn their names from consideration before letting it come to that.⁵⁶

Calhoun found himself in a situation unique in American history. Because of the collapse of the caucus system—although Crawford had been the caucus nominee, the majority of Republican congressmen had not participated in the caucus—Calhoun had been elected on his own merits. This was the only time that a vice president could claim that he had been chosen specifically for the position, and was “vice president because he was important, not important because he was vice president.”⁵⁷ President Adams never accepted that fact.

At this point, Calhoun began reconceiving national politics, holding the South the unsullied, republican region not implicated in the

the *Richmond Enquirer*” explaining that if Clay had really been corrupt, he might have been in the Cabinet far sooner. Of course, he had never before had a chance at the top job.

⁵⁵It seems likely that it was, though. See, e.g., Robert V. Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), pp. 251–72. For the imperative that the “Corrupt Bargain” imposed on Calhoun, see John C. Calhoun, *Life of John C. Calhoun* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), pp. 29–30.

⁵⁶Calhoun would have averted any repetition of this problem by means of a constitutional amendment providing for direct election of the president, hardly what one would expect from Freehling’s elitist. Calhoun to Samuel Southard, October 11, 1825, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 47–48.

⁵⁷*The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, p. xiii.

“Corrupt Bargain,” the federal government vulnerable to the manipulations of self-interested spoilsmen, and the Adams administration representative of all that Calhoun opposed. Though the British threat was in abeyance, the vigilant republican found enemies at home.

VICE PRESIDENT CALHOUN

Although the Constitution names the vice president as the president of the Senate, vice presidents of the Virginia Dynasty era were essentially presidents in absentia. Therefore, the Senate had felt free to give its presiding officer—in the vice president’s accustomed absence, the president *pro tempore*, an officer elected by the Senate from among its membership—the power to appoint all committee members.⁵⁸ Calhoun’s use of that power would play a part in the most interesting flap of the John Quincy Adams administration.

The vice presidency was then, as it is now, a position from which it was difficult for an ambitious man to keep himself in the public eye. Calhoun’s strategy was to remind people of his wartime contributions and to lament the results of the recent election. In a May 27, 1825, speech near Pendleton, Calhoun reminded listeners that, as a young man, he had seen that the United States were “unprepared” for war—a war that nonetheless had to be fought. With the war’s successful conclusion, he had not been among those on whom its experience was lost: he had supported (at the least) the Monroe-era policy of military preparation. In conclusion, Calhoun opined that the cornerstone of the American political system was office-holders’ responsibility to the people “through frequent elections fairly conducted.” This, he said, explained his early withdrawal from the recent presidential campaign.⁵⁹ That this distinguished Calhoun from Adams and Clay was clear.

With the passing of 1825, Calhoun became convinced that Adams would lose in 1828; his deal with Clay would not be rewarded.⁶⁰ Not everyone shared his view, however, and since Calhoun held the highest office of any administration opponent, he suffered the parti-

⁵⁸ Niven, *John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union*, p. 114.

⁵⁹ “Speech at Abbeville, South Carolina,” May 27, 1825, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 21–24.

⁶⁰ Calhoun to Samuel Gouverneur, June 10, 1825, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 26–27.

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san scrutiny of the administration press. Ironically, the administration’s leading claim was that the Senate president was too indulgent of John Randolph’s meandering discourse.

On March 30, 1826, Randolph had (typically) moved to table some pending legislation. Nothing could have been more common. New Jersey Senator Mahlon Dickerson sought to speak on the motion, but Calhoun, presiding, refused permission. Randolph then spoke for a half hour on his motion. When the Virginian had finished, Dickerson again claimed the floor, but Calhoun again refused to grant him permission. Instead, Calhoun spoke at length on the powers of the presiding officer.⁶¹

As the matter became an issue of political gossip, Calhoun felt it necessary to justify his behavior. The speech in which he did so began with the assertion that the Senate should delegate no authority to the chair which it could exercise itself, for the vice president was neither of the senators’ number nor responsible to them. The rules of the Senate under which he claimed to have acted were as follows:

Senate Rule 6: When a member shall be called to order, he shall sit down, until the President shall have determined whether he is in order or not; and every question of order shall be decided by the President, without debate; but if there be a doubt in his mind, he may call for the sense of the Senate.

Senate Rule 7: If the member be called to order, for words spoken, the exceptionable words shall immediately be taken down, in writing, that the President may be better enabled to judge of the matter.

He said that, after much consideration, he had decided that these two rules left it to members to call senators to order; the presiding officer’s was “an appellate power only,” which was a wise allocation of authority. As his was an odd relationship to the Senate, Calhoun read his writ strictly. He begged the Senate’s indulgence and resumed his seat.⁶²

⁶¹“Senate Proceedings on a Proposed Amendment of the Constitution,” March 30, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 87–88.

⁶²“Speech on the Rules of the Senate and the Powers of the Vice-President,” [sic] April 15, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 88–90. In a letter published in both of the major Washington papers in

Meanwhile, a storm was rising on another front. Randolph, ever the oppositionist, was aghast at both the Corrupt Bargain and the new administration's agenda. Just after Congress convened in December 1825, Randolph launched one of his classic tirades. At the end of a lengthy speech, he said the whole of his grievance stemmed from "the coalition of Blifil and Black George . . . the combination, unheard of till then, of the puritan with the blackleg."⁶³ The fallout from this speech included a duel between Randolph, Virginia's most flamboyant politician, and Clay, the U.S. secretary of state.

It also engendered a firestorm of criticism of Calhoun. One critic, in an essay pseudonymously signed "Patrick Henry," attacked him for sitting mute as Randolph digressed from the business at hand for hours at a time; his accuser also dredged up Calhoun's behavior during the Randolph-Dickerson affair. After all, Calhoun had said it was the senators' purview to make points of order; why, then, had he interrupted Dickerson on his own? "Patrick Henry" concluded that Calhoun's real intent was to let administration enemies animadvert to their hearts' content. Randolph, for example, often digressed, yet Calhoun sat passively in what the critic called "a flagrant official non-feasance." The Constitution made the vice president the Senate's presiding officer; under Calhoun's self-justificatory theory, if the Senate did not assign to him the power to preside, he did not have it. What kind of constitutionalism was that? Obviously, his power to squelch such as Randolph was inherent; the rules Calhoun had cited simply supplemented the office's inherent power—they were not alternatives to it.

"Patrick Henry" said that the vice presidency and the presidency

the second week following Calhoun's speech, Dickerson protested Calhoun's opponents' claim that he had been mistreated. *United States Telegraph*, April 25, 1826; *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 25, 1826; both are cited in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, p. 91. Calhoun's solicitude for the Senate's, as opposed to his own, position had its capstone in his remarks to the Senate on February 14, 1828, when he praised the Senate's decision to make the Chair's decision appealable to the entire Senate. *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, p. 349. He also noted in private that the decision supported "Onslow's" claim that the power was not inherent in the vice presidency. Calhoun to Virgil Maxcy, February 15, 1828, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 349–50.

⁶³Merrill Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 140.

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pro tempore were offices of different kinds. The Senate could abolish the latter at will, but the people had created the former. Thus, “Patrick Henry” argued, Calhoun’s respect for the Senate was greater than his respect for the people; this made a mockery of Calhoun’s trumpeted respect for the majesty of the sovereign people. None of Calhoun’s predecessors had been so partial, not even Aaron Burr!⁶⁴

For Calhoun, this offered a wonderful opportunity. First, Calhoun thought, as did many others, that “Patrick Henry” was President Adams himself.⁶⁵ Second, the unpopularity that had resulted from the Corrupt Bargain was worsened by the proposals contained in President Adams’s first annual message. Although he had repeatedly said that Congress should not pursue any of his programs it believed to be prohibited by the Tenth Amendment, the knowledge that Adams was willing to propose such over-reaching in the first place had Republicans in a lather.⁶⁶

Calhoun’s initial response in the Senate came on May 18, 1826. In answer to a rhetorical dust-up, he said that he would only call to order when the Senate’s rules allowed. “The Chair had no authority but what was vested in the Chair by the rule of the Senate itself. . . . The Chair . . . would stand in the light of a usurper, were it to attempt to exercise such a power.”⁶⁷

His next move was to enter the debate in print himself by assuming as his *nom de plume* “Onslow,” the name of a famous Whig speaker of the House of Commons. In his first “Onslow” letter, Calhoun denied not only that he had the power to call senators to order “for words spoken in debate,” but that the words in question would have been subject to a point of order in any event. Never, in any Eng-

⁶⁴“Patrick Henry” to the Editor of the Washington, D.C., *National Journal*, May 1, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 92–96.

⁶⁵See “Onslow” to “Patrick Henry,” June 27, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 135–47. This assumption remained ubiquitous for a century and a half thereafter. See Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, p. 119. For “Patrick Henry’s” true identity, see Charles J. Catlett to Philip R. Fendall, October 17, 1826, Philip R. Fendall Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

⁶⁶Risjord, *The Old Republicans*, pp. 258–59.

⁶⁷“Remarks on the Power to Call to Order—In the Senate,” May 18, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 97–99.

lish-speaking legislative chamber, had it been out of order to call attention to Executive corruption. Thus, to claim that the president and secretary of state had “formed a corrupt coalition” could not be improper. Calhoun had been blamed for the Clay-Randolph duel, but it had been Randolph’s right to utter words which “nothing but a despotic Power, worse than the sedition law, could have prevented him from uttering!” As for the Dickerson episode, all debate had been out of order; a motion to table could be discussed, he said, only by the moving senator.

The rest of Calhoun’s article involved references to legal precedent similar to those employed by “Patrick Henry.” The consensus among historians is that this learned sparring was inconclusive. Nonetheless, “Onslow’s” legal arguments were probably more appealing as rhetoric, for his initial essay more closely resembled those of the 1770s; “Patrick Henry’s” recalled the 1798 Federalist arguments, which, along with Adams’s parentage, helps explain “Onslow’s” reference to the Sedition Act.

The Senate majority apparently had not seen any problems with Calhoun’s attitude, for, while it returned committee appointment power to the president *pro tempore*, it did nothing to augment the vice president’s parliamentary power. Tellingly, not even the administration’s friends in the Senate had disputed Calhoun. Calhoun’s construction of Senate rules and the Constitution limited his own powers. What harm could come of that? “Ought a debate, involving the conduct and motives of Executive officers, to be checked by the Chair, when every member of the Senate deems it to be in order?” “Patrick Henry’s” charge of ambition was an odd answer to a refusal to grasp at power, “Onslow” said in closing.⁶⁸

The exchange got Calhoun’s juices flowing. In a letter written shortly thereafter, he said,

we are on the eve of a great political struggle, which the papers in the interest of Mr. Adams & Clay attribute to “factious opposition”; but which, if I do not greatly mistake, springs from causes far deeper.

Echoing Madison’s “Publius” writings, Calhoun said that faction could

⁶⁸“Onslow” to the Editor of the Washington, D.C. *National Journal* (printed instead in the *National Intelligencer* on May 20, 1826), *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 99–104.

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not long excite a large territory; only causes “such as in the opinion of the people are calculated to endanger liberty, or arrest the national prosperity” could do that. The people were right to be agitated, for “the liberty of this country was never in greater danger.”

Since the American Executive was unitary, only responsibility kept it in check. Clay’s move from the House to the Cabinet had impaired his popularity, as he must have expected. He must therefore have believed that offices would soon be more dependent on patronage than popularity, a deduction that the administration’s behavior reinforced. “The struggle, I do believe, is between liberty and power.”

As for himself, Calhoun thought he possessed the purity of the driven snow:

In opposing the caucus, the choice of electors by State legislatures, the control of Juntos, or political leaders, I was actuated by the principles, that now guide me. It has ever been the object dearest to me to procure the ascendancy of the popular voice in our system.⁶⁹

His June 4, 1826, letter (headed “Private”) to Andrew Jackson addressed in the starkest terms the dichotomy represented by the administration and its opponents: power versus liberty. Calhoun used such phrases as “liberty never was in greater danger,” “the power and patronage of the Executive, or the voice of the people,” and so on.⁷⁰ Clay and Adams (especially Clay) represented a factious cabal, a new Walpole ministry. If their system should become established, hereditary monarchy would not be far behind. Jackson was the hope of

⁶⁹Calhoun to Micah Sterling, May 31, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 107–9.

⁷⁰This was a theme he took up often during the Adams administration. See Calhoun to John Gardiner, February 16, 1828, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 350–51. Calhoun’s rhetoric throughout this period seems identical to that of the 1770s Revolutionaries and the 1790s Republicans, as described in, e.g., Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), and Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978). The apocalyptic tones of early American opposition writings owe much to their English precursors.

the Republic, “under Providence,” to thwart the attempt.

“Patrick Henry” published his second missive on June 7, 1826. He had realized that “Onslow” was Calhoun, and addressed him thus.⁷¹ Other than that, while he adduced new precedents in support of old arguments, there was little new in the letter. Calhoun’s question whether the vice president should be able to shut off Senate debate unfriendly to the Executive—to the vice president, for example—was “vulgar rhetoric,” he argued. Calhoun’s *feigned* reluctance to grasp power reminded “Patrick Henry” of Caesar, Cromwell, and Burr.

Of all the species of *moderation* in a public man, that which disclaims an authority delegated to him by the People for their own benefit, is the least entitled to applause, and the most obvious to suspicion.⁷²

Calhoun saw “Patrick Henry’s” rhetoric, with its references to Jefferson as the “Sage of Monticello” (then seen as a slur), its allusions to Milton, its reliance on Roman, to the exclusion of Greek, historical allusions, and other New England rhetorical devices as the idiom of a new faction whose appeal was to power, not virtue. This was the idiom, the mindset, that Calhoun would associate with the North ever after. To Virginia’s Senator Littleton Walker Tazewell, in the first of Calhoun’s published papers in which he places such reliance on the South, he wrote:

I rejoice to learn, that Virginia is perfectly sound [that is, reliably anti-Adams]. . . . There can be no reaction in favour of liberty in the present state of our country, which does not come from the slave holding States, headed by Virginia and sustained by Pennsylvania. This the coalition doubtless understand . . . [, so] I anticipate the renewal of the Missouri question. If I mistake not, it has already commenced.

In an attempt to divide the opposition, one of Clay’s lieutenants in the House had referred to slavery in the District of Columbia as “the only form in which the question can be brought under discussion in Con-

⁷¹Charles Catlett to Philip Fendall, October 17, 1826, Philip Richard Fendall Papers, explains how: Calhoun had used the word “illy” both in a published speech and in the first “Onslow” letter. See the text at n. 8 above.

⁷²“Patrick Henry” to the Editor of the Washington, D.C. *National Journal*, June 7, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 113–27.

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gress, free from decisive Constitutional objections.”⁷³

Calhoun set his new line of thought before the public in “Onslow’s” June 27, 1826, letter. “Patrick Henry,” said “Onslow,” always favored concentrations of power “in the fewest and least responsible hands.” Why had he devoted so much attention to Senate rules and Parliamentary precedents when, in the end, he would rely on the vice president’s fiat? The Constitution explicitly gave the Senate the power to establish its own rules. How, then, could the vice president interrupt when senators did not want him to? “Whatever right the Vice-President possesses over order, must be derived from the Senate. . . . I affirm that, as a presiding officer, he has no inherent power whatever.”

Calhoun had espied monarchical tendencies, and he meant for the public to notice them:

There was a time when minions of power thought it monstrous, that all of the powers of rulers should be derived from so low and filthy a source as the People whom they governed. “A deeper and holier foundation” [“Patrick Henry’s” words] of power was sought, and that was proclaimed to be in the “inherent” divine “right of rulers.”

Further, he argued, inherent powers are powers that are necessary to the office; the fact that no other legislative president held this power inherently proved it was not essential to the office.

Calhoun did not think the driving motive of “Patrick Henry’s” allies was to undermine public liberty; rather, he believed their thirst for the sweet nectar of emoluments and honorifics had led them to plot to retain office by corrupt means.⁷⁴ Freedom of debate was the first bulwark against such men, and to do away with it would be to take a long step toward despotism. Restoration of party rivalry

⁷³Calhoun to Littleton Tazewell, June 13, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 128–29. Also see Calhoun to Micah Sterling, September 20, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 204–5; Calhoun to Littleton Tazewell, April 1, 1827, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 282–83; Calhoun to Littleton Tazewell, July 1, 1827, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 292–94.

⁷⁴This is what Nathaniel Macon, an “Old Republican” leader, also feared. See Risjord, *The Old Republicans*, pp. 254–55.

(which Calhoun would ever oppose⁷⁵) might return the vice presidency to the president's control, thus bringing Senate debate under the same control and "shielding his conduct from investigation": "The Senate would speedily sink into a body to register the decrees of the President, and sing Hosannas in his praise, and be as degraded as the Roman Senate, under Nero."⁷⁶

"Onslow's" earlier reference to the Sedition Act was calculated to bring to mind unhappy memories associated with President Adams's family, an effort he repeated in his reference in his June 29 letter to the attempt to make the common law part of federal law.⁷⁷ "Patrick Henry" had provided him ammunition via an assertion that rules of the House of Commons were binding in the Senate. "Onslow" scored additional rhetorical points by pointing out that in defending Dicker-son, "Patrick Henry" was standing up for a senator who was "not conscious of any injustice having been inflicted." "Onslow's" most powerful rhetorical move of the whole debate may have been in his answer to "Patrick Henry's" complaint about Calhoun's use of his power to assign senators to committees. Taking one committee at a time, "Onslow" defended each appointee to whose appointment "Patrick Henry" had objected by name. This was a rhetorical move "Patrick Henry" could not answer without offending the senators in question and thereby damaging the Adams administration.

Randolph, "Onslow" continued, had been in Congress for a quarter of a century. He had always been mercurial, always biting. Not once had any speaker of the House or vice president, including Henry Clay, interrupted him because of the nature of his statements. Randolph had been equally severe toward the three preceding presidents; the novel element in the equation was that Adams and Clay did not intend to brook dissent.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Freehling, "Spoilsmen and Interests in the Thought and Career of John C. Calhoun," *passim*.

⁷⁶"Speech on the Power to Call to Order—Senate," February 12, 1828, *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 346–48.

⁷⁷Once again, Calhoun distinguished between his behavior as president of the Senate, where he had stood for power in the many, and "Patrick Henry's" position. The common law was judge-made law, a feudal vestige more appropriate in principle to England than to America.

⁷⁸"Onslow" to "Patrick Henry," June 29, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Cal-*

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“Patrick Henry” ultimately proved overmatched in the battle of wits. From that point on, he engaged mainly in a series of word games, verbal feints that could not possibly persuade the unpersuaded. His position was inherently unappealing: although he might attribute the delegation of power to the agency of the people, it appeared that he wanted that power to be essentially unaccountable. He had no answer to “Onslow’s” point about the possibility of presidential control over the vice president.

In his August 8, 1826, column, “Patrick Henry” took the untenable position that the administration had a right to expect each Senate committee to include a pro-administration majority. Calhoun’s appointments had been reflective of the Senate’s actual make-up, and that galled “Patrick Henry.”⁷⁹ It is almost as if he wanted to lose the debate in the court of public opinion. “Onslow” would soon characterize this notion as “not less slavish than absurd.”⁸⁰

Finally, Calhoun settled on a basically sectional explanation of events. Clay was to blame for a resuscitation of the 1798–1800 contest; Adams, “like a ball on a plane, which may easily be moved in any direction,” was his dupe. The Federalists’ principles, though bad, had been better than the administration’s, which combined the personnel of “the old Federal party of ’98 and the barg[a]in and sale party of the West. That is the real union,” Calhoun wrote.⁸¹ The opposition resembled “Brutus, Cato, Hampden, Washington, and Jefferson.”⁸²

As the debate raged, Calhoun’s assurance of victory over Adams and Clay, along with his confidence in his own and his section’s righteousness, grew.⁸³ So did his belief that grasping politicians

houn, vol. 10, pp. 147–55.

⁷⁹“Patrick Henry,” August 8, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 188–97.

⁸⁰Where, he asked, would that have left the opponents of the Stuarts? “Ons-low” to “Patrick Henry,” October 12, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 223–32.

⁸¹“To Levi Woodbury ‘Confidential,’” September 21, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 205–7.

⁸²“Onslow” to “Patrick Henry,” October 12, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 223–32.

⁸³Calhoun to Micah Sterling, December 16, 1826, *The Papers of John C.*

would attempt to drum up sectional animosity. Never had American institutions been so endangered, he argued, even in the days of Federalism; a loss in the 1828 election would leave the Executive predominant. Yet, the South, the nation's hope, daily became more united; the Northern coalition could attempt to exploit the slave question, but Pennsylvania would not be swayed; the opposition would triumph.⁸⁴ Calhoun's growing sense that he and his friends would win led him to conclude his last "Onslow" letter with a challenge to "Patrick Henry": why not debate the merits of Adams's/Clay's ascension, the principle of which would have legitimated the selection of Burr over Jefferson in the House in 1800? "Patrick Henry" never responded.

PORK BARREL POLITICS AND SECTIONALISM

From Calhoun's perspective, one of the most deleterious effects of Clay's cabal on the American political system was its open promotion of what we today call "pork barrel" politics. This tactic, Calhoun realized, was useful in building (corrupt) coalitions; it was also bound to have disparate effects, its beneficiaries being those parts of the country whose (corrupt) politicians played the game, and its victims those whose (virtuous) representatives refused. This problem haunted Calhoun through the rest of his career.⁸⁵

Since the growing popularity of General Jackson seemed destined to put the problem to rest, Calhoun was temporarily at ease over the matter. Little did he know, however, that Jackson's election would bring in its train the domination of Martin Van Buren's Democratic Party; indeed, Calhoun would one day see Van Buren as the ultimate spoilsman. For now, he could toast, "The Union of the States:

Calhoun, vol. 10, pp. 237–38; Calhoun to Lt. James Colhoun, December 24, 1826, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 238–40; Calhoun to Virgil Maxcy, January 14, 1827, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 251–52.

⁸⁴Calhoun to Bartlett Yancey, January 14, 1827, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 252–53.

⁸⁵For the effects on Calhoun's mature political theory, see Freehling, "Spoilsmen and Interests in the Thought and Career of John C. Calhoun," pp. 25–42. In this, as in many other things, Calhoun came after 1824 to be firmly in the intellectual tradition of John Taylor of Caroline.

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Founded on the principles of Reason and Justice—its preservation requires an equal participation, in all parts, of its benefits and its burdens.”⁸⁶

Calhoun increasingly believed that Madison had been wrong: extension of the sphere did not necessarily—by multiplying the interests vying for federal government favor—guarantee that no one interest would ever face a hostile majority for long. When Pennsylvania’s pro-tariff faction called a convention in Harrisburg in late 1827, he wrote to Tazewell that the American Constitution protected “the *constituents against rulers*,” but did not provide for “*the protection of one portion of the people against another*.” What was being hatched in Harrisburg was a permanent, selfish taxation of one part of the country for the benefit of another—exactly what Calhoun’s 1817 Bonus Bill had been intended to avert. “I deeply fear,” Calhoun continued, “that the simple alternative of submission, or resistance will be presented to the oppressed.”

State veto and the repeal of Section 25 of the Judiciary Act of 1789, which provided for appeal of state court decisions to the federal courts, were possible remedies;⁸⁷ as it stood, the states had no check on federal government mis/malfeasance.⁸⁸ Clay had conceived a system which the North and West would never have any (selfish) motive to abolish, leading Calhoun to write “Dissolution or tyrann[ny] is approaching.”⁸⁹ These views were not merely for public or political

⁸⁶“Speech at a Dinner for Romulus Saunders,” March 10, 1827, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 277–78.

⁸⁷Calhoun to Bartlett Yancey, July 16, 1828, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, p. 401, shows that Calhoun based this notion on the writings of James Madison. “The Virginia Report and resolution in ’98 are conclusive,” he said, on the authority of the states to veto. See also Kevin R. [Constantine] Gutzman, “A Troublesome Legacy: James Madison and ‘The Principles of ’98’,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (Winter 1995), pp. 569–89.

⁸⁸This notion is most cogently expressed in Calhoun to John McLean, October 4, 1828, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 426–28.

⁸⁹Calhoun to Littleton Tazewell, August 25, 1827, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 300–2. The tariff *had* to be removed, or “a shock at no long interval may be expected.” Worse, party feeling (a sectional party?) must follow. Calhoun to James Monroe, July 10, 1828, *The Papers*

consumption (Tazewell, recall, was a Virginia senator), for Calhoun repeated them in a letter to his nephew.⁹⁰

Calhoun had long been concerned lest internal improvements descend from national to local in benefit. Thus, from his position in the Monroe Cabinet, he had opposed federal support of intrastate improvements. This position was unaltered, perhaps strengthened, by his views of the Adams administration.⁹¹ The downturn in the South Carolina economy (which affected the Lord of Fort Hill as much as anyone) must have impressed upon Calhoun the urgency of the anti-Adams cause.⁹²

Calhoun's opposition to the Adams administration should not be mistaken for opposition to the Union, however. When Dr. Cooper called for calculation of the Union's value, Calhoun and, he guessed, the vast majority of Southerners, objected.⁹³ Yet, he did note that Cooper's talk could have a positive effect: it would probably make tariff proponents reconsider their position.⁹⁴

CONCLUSION

The Calhoun who wrote the "South Carolina Exposition" had much in common with the Calhoun who was a South Carolina War Hawk in 1812. Each was devoted to the American republic as he understood it. Each was ready to take bold, even reckless, steps as the situation demanded. Each was prone, as Henry Clay remarked, to see a crisis in situations which seemed much less dire to many of

of John C. Calhoun, vol. 10, pp. 398–400.

⁹⁰Calhoun to Lt. James E. Colhoun, August 26, 1827, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 302–5.

⁹¹"Speech on Internal Improvements," April 10, 1828, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 370–72.

⁹²See Calhoun to Micah Sterling, June 29, 1828, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 391–92 (The South sees the tariff as "the real source of the their [*sic*] present embarrassment, and I may, add impoverishment"); Calhoun to Andrew Jackson, July 10, 1828, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 395–97.

⁹³Calhoun to John McLean, July 10, 1828, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 397–98.

⁹⁴Calhoun to Samuel Ingham, October 28, 1827, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 10, pp. 311–12.

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his contemporaries.

In 1812, the “crisis” Calhoun addressed was that of the Union’s existence, of an external threat to the legacy of the Founding Fathers (including his own father). The events of 1824 raised in Calhoun’s mind the specter of a threat to the republic from within, of a new mode of politics threatening the Founders’ republicanism. After the “Corrupt Bargain,” only the South seemed to have that old-time virtue.

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