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The Hayne-Webster Debate - II

Lead: Starting out to debate high tariffs and the sale of cheap western land, in January 1930 Senators Robert Y. Hayne and Daniel Webster got sidetracked.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The Founders settled a number of important issues when they constructed the United States, but the Constitution of 1787 left untreated several key matters. One was the running sore of slavery and closely associated with that was the

unresolved question of states' rights. The several sovereign states had come together to form the Union, but what powers did they retain? In 1830 high tariffs on imported goods were threatening the overseas sale of southern cotton. Dixie congressmen were hoping to find common cause with westerners also threatened in their case by a proposed halt in the sale of cheap federal land.

Senator Robert Young Hayne was a self-educated lawyer from the low country of South Carolina, he began the debate on land use but then broadened the discussion to the power of the Federal government in the states. He was following the theory advanced by fellow South Carolinian,

Vice-president John C. Calhoun. In 1828, Calhoun published *South Carolina Exposition*. In it he explained the curious idea of nullification. Calhoun and Hayne believed that a state could nullify or cancel within its boundaries any federal law it considered detrimental to its interests. At first reluctant to engage Hayne on the broader issue, Senator Daniel Webster of Massachusetts tried to keep the question focused on land use, but finally took up the broader issue. If nullification prevailed then the Union was bound together with a "Rope of Sand" rendering it almost useless. Hayne retorted with a full exposition of nullification and Webster then rose, looked at the grizzled Calhoun presiding in the chair and

uttered perhaps the most stirring defense of the Union until Abraham Lincoln's debates with Stephen Douglas in the 1850s. Next time: Daniel Webster replies.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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