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The Hayne-Webster Debate - III

Lead: Their debate may have begun on the questions of tariffs and sale of cheap western land, but in January 1830, Hayne and Webster really were debating the future of the Union.

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

Content: In 1830 many southerners thought tariffs hurt the sales of cotton overseas. Many westerners were angered that the federal government was considering cutting back on the sale of cheap land which was one reason people were moving west. For

decades this was a powerful alliance of convenience, but in January 1830 the debate over land boiled over into a argument over the Constitution. On one side was Senator Robert Hayne of South Carolina. He believed that a state could cancel or nullify any federal law it thought wrong. He was opposed by Daniel Webster.

Webster graduated from Dartmouth, practiced law in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, and in 1822 was elected to Congress from Boston. He was opposed to slavery, but like Henry Clay was willing to compromise with the south in order to preserve the Union. Nullification, however, to Webster was a dagger in the heart of the Constitution. Replying

to Hayne, Webster gave one of the most powerful defenses of federal sovereignty ever uttered. He closed with these words that would in a future generation inspire the armies of the Republic in their defense of the Union, "When my eyes shall behold for the last time the sun in heaven, may I not see him shining on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union; on states dissevered, discordant, belligerent; on a land rent with civil feuds, or drenched, it may be, in fraternal blood? Let their last feeble and lingering glance rather behold the gorgeous ensign of the Republic, now known and honored throughout the earth, still full high advanced, its arms and trophies streaming in their original luster, not a

stripe erased or polluted, not a single star obscured, bearing for its motto...[that] sentiment, dear to every true American heart - Liberty *and* Union, now and forever, one and inseparable."

Both sides thought they had won the Hayne-Webster Debate, and until the Civil War the U.S. was a low-tariff country dominated by the alliance of low-tariff South and cheap land West, but slavery remained a blight upon national life and Daniel Webster's happy vision of the Union would only be secured by a bloody Civil War.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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