



DOCUMENTS DECODED



The Jacksonian and Antebellum Eras



[John R. Vile]

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John R. Vile



An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC
Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Vile, John R., author.

Title: The Jacksonian and antebellum eras : documents decoded / John R. Vile.
Description: Santa Barbara, California : ABC-CLIO, 2017. | Series: Documents decoded | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016021642 (print) | LCCN 2016041952 (ebook) | ISBN 9781440849817 (print : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781440849824 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: United States—Politics and government—1815-1861—Sources. | United States—Politics and government—1829-1837—Sources. | United States—History—1815-1861—Sources.

Classification: LCC E338 .V55 2017 (print) | LCC E338 (ebook) | DDC 973.5—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016021642>

ISBN: 978-1-4408-4981-7


EISBN: 978-1-4408-4982-4

21 20 19 18 17 1 2 3 4 5

This book is also available as an eBook.

ABC-CLIO
An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC

ABC-CLIO, LLC
130 Cremona Drive, P.O. Box 1911
Santa Barbara, California 93116-1911
www.abc-clio.com

This book is printed on acid-free paper 

Manufactured in the United States of America

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Introduction to the Antebellum Period

Introduction

The fact that this is the third in a series of *Documents Decoded* books that I have compiled should be a sufficient indication that I like the format of these books, which combine edited primary documents with commentary and annotations that are suitable for high school and college students and for citizens who want to get a better perspective of various issues and historical periods. The first two of these books that I wrote dealt respectively with founding documents (the period up to the ratification of the Bill of Rights), and the early republic (George Washington through John Quincy Adams). This volume continues this series by covering the period from the election of Andrew Jackson as president in 1828 through the election and inauguration of President Lincoln in 1861, with the next volume to cover the Civil War and Reconstruction periods.

For convenience's sake, I have divided this book into three periods. The first focuses on Andrew Jackson's years as president, the second on the years from the end of his presidency until 1850, and the third on the events from 1850 to 1861 that eventually led to the Civil War. All three periods were marked by deep sectional and ideological divisions, especially between North and South, and by calls for both continuing national expansion and reform. The antebellum period was notable for replacing the method of selecting presidential candidates by congressional caucus with national nominating conventions and in increasing political participation through torchlight parades and other party activities. Although both the right of suffrage and rates of political participation among white males appear to have increased appreciably

(a development often associated with the Jacksonian Era and with the second party system), this development did not extend to Native Americans, African Americans, or women.

The Jackson Years

Andrew Jackson remains one of America's most forceful and consequential presidents, and his two terms from 1829 through 1837 were marked by numerous events. He entered office thinking that he had been robbed in the previous presidential election, in which he believed that the Electoral College had allowed improper intrigue among the other three candidates, especially John Quincy Adams, who had awarded the position of secretary of state to Henry Clay in what Jackson charged was a "corrupt bargain." The year Jackson was finally elected, South Carolina was vigorously protesting the imposition of a higher tariff on incoming manufactured goods that its opponents dubbed the "tariff of abominations" because they believed it favored northern commercial and industrial interests, which were seeking protection against foreign competition, over their own plantation economy, which depended on the importation of manufacturing goods. This controversy served as the platform for a much larger discussion of sectional issues in general and of slavery in particular. The senatorial debate featured not only Robert Hayne of South Carolina and Daniel Webster of Massachusetts (the two senators featured in readings here), but also a host of other notables. The debates are a reminder that three senators, Webster, John C. Calhoun (Jackson's vice president, who was coaching Hayne from the sidelines), and

Henry Clay of Kentucky, who respectively represented the North, South, and West, were as influential in the first half of the 19th century as many U.S. presidents.

Jackson, who certainly favored the continuing division of powers between the national and state governments, had little sympathy for the doctrine of nullification that Calhoun, Hayne, and other southern leaders were espousing, and is said on his deathbed to have regretted that he had not hanged John C. Calhoun (the chief author of South Carolina's Exposition and Protest) for treason. As Jackson was indicating that he would use force to stop such actions in their tracks, a former president, James Madison, was working quietly behind the scenes to argue that southern leaders were hijacking and misinterpreting the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, which he and Jefferson had authored to resist the Alien and Sedition Acts in a previous era.

The first U.S. party system, which had developed during the Washington administration and which featured Democratic-Republican followers of Jefferson and Madison and Federalist followers of the policies of Alexander Hamilton, had largely died out during the administration of James Monroe (who had ushered in the Era of Good Feelings). However, a second-party system reemerged in the aftermath of the fractured election of 1824, which had featured four candidates, with the defeated Jackson claiming the old Jeffersonian mantle of the Democratic Party in the next presidential election. In turn, many former Federalists coalesced into the Whig Party, which would win its first presidency in the election of 1840 and carry on the broad governmental vision of early Federalists. Many of the issues of this second party period resembled those of the earlier era. Henry Clay trumpeted his "American System," favored by most Whigs, consisting of a strong national bank and internal improvements designed to bind the nation together, while Democrats preferred a more limited government, probably best epitomized by Jackson's war with the banks and his veto of some domestic improvement bills.

Prior to becoming president, Jackson had already established himself as an Indian fighter, and his administration continued the policy of Indian removal, justified by the thin veneer that such removal was "voluntary" because Indians (who were relatively defenseless against state encroachments on their territorial claims) had been paid for their lands. The Supreme Court attempted to intervene but found that Jackson was not nearly as eager to enforce its judgments with respect to Native Americans as he had been willing to denounce other state assertions of the doctrine of nullification. As Cherokees filed their own articulate protests, the plight of such Native Americans stirred the conscience of individuals like Margaret Beecher, who would later be part of the movement for the abolition of slavery and for women's rights. In the meantime, William Lloyd Garrison, who founded the *Liberator* in 1831, made it clear that abolitionists would be content with no half measures, only to be initially met in Congress with a resolution designed to table any motions that it received for the elimination of slavery.

Expansion, Reform, and Manifest Destiny

In the period from 1832 to 1850, the nation continued physically to expand, so much so that journalist John O'Sullivan likely expressed what many others had been thinking in proclaiming that it was America's "manifest destiny" to expand from coast to coast. But what role should government play in such expansion, and what kind of nation would it be?

James K. Polk, one of the most forceful presidents to serve during this period and a strong southern spokesman, was dismayed neither by the possibility of adding more slave states (something the Wilmot Proviso had attempted to prevent) nor by the possibility of placing American troops in a position where they might provoke war with a weaker neighbor from which they could take still more territory. Then congressman Abraham

Lincoln was among those who questioned this policy. As the nation added new states and territories, the issue of slavery became an ever more pressing one, in part because there were so many possible flashpoints and in part because a former slave, Frederick Douglass, was pricking the nation's conscience with an account of his own escape from bondage. The Supreme Court intervened fairly unsuccessfully in *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* (1842) by affirming the right to recapture slaves without compelling states to which they had fled to lend their own aid. Henry David Thoreau, who was friends with leading American Transcendentalists and was otherwise little occupied with politics, was among those who advised civil disobedience to bring the issue to the forefront.

As in the previous period, the spectacle of southerners coming north to capture and return escaped slaves stoked abolitionist sentiments at a time when slavery spokesmen were moving from the position that slavery was a necessary evil that would ultimately end to that of proclaiming it to be a positive good that should continue forever. Attempts to abolish slavery also stimulated other reform movements, the most notable expression of which was the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. It launched a call for woman's suffrage that, while ridiculed in its own day, ultimately bore bear fruit in the next century.

Prelude to Irrepressible Conflict

Politically, the year 1850, like 1820, was dominated by controversies over slavery. In his last major legislative initiative, Kentucky's Henry Clay (dubbed "the Great Compromiser") attempted to piece together a compromise that would address issues related to slave runaways and slavery in the territories, and related issues. Just as the Court in *Cooley v. Board of Wardens* would soon delineate respective spheres of state and national action, so too the Compromise of 1850 attempted to reconcile northern and southern interests at a time when

Sojourner Truth and others were reiterating the humanity of slaves and Frederick Douglass (who contemplated migrating from the nation prior to the election of Abraham Lincoln) pondered his role as a free black in a nation that that declared that all men were created equal while tolerating slavery. Within a year, Harriet Beecher Stowe would answer southern arguments that slavery was a positive good, not with philosophical arguments or appeals to founding documents but instead with purple prose and sometimes-maudlin dialogue that highlighted how slavery made tyrants of slave owners and split slave families.

The year 1854 may well have been an even more important turning point than 1850, as Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois suggested that the nation should dispense with the line that the Missouri Compromise had drawn between free states and slave states and replace it with the idea of "popular sovereignty." Under this doctrine, each state would decide whether it wanted to enter the Union with a free or slave constitution, and the nation would express total indifference as to its choice.

Although it initially won him support from southern slaveholders, it is doubtful that Douglas fully realized the Pandora's box that he was opening. This policy led both pro- and anti-slavery proponents to flock into the territories of Kansas and Nebraska in hopes of gaining an additional state on their side. Kansas was soon dubbed "bloody Kansas" and provided the breeding ground for the violence of John Brown, who would later move to Harpers Ferry, Virginia (today West Virginia), where he would unsuccessfully attempt to spark a slave revolt through military action, while providing a martyr to the anti-slavery cause. In opposing the so-called LeCompton Constitution for Kansas, Douglas showed that he was unwilling to substitute faux democracy for genuine popular approval of a constitution, but Lincoln argued that contrary to the principles of the Declaration of Independence, Douglas had substituted popular sovereignty for a genuine commitment to putting slavery on a course of ultimate extinction.

As southern slavery proponents sought further to denigrate the intelligence and humanity of slaves, so too others, most notably members of the newly formed Know-Nothing Party, began expressing heightened concern over immigrants and Roman Catholics (as the number of immigrants from Ireland and southern Europe increased, the two categories often overlapped), whom they feared were bringing foreign habits, loyalties, and notions of authoritarian government with them. In the meantime, as the Whig Party collapsed over the issue of slavery and the Democratic Party divided into northern and southern wings, the Republican Party emerged in 1854 (with help from the members of the Free Soil movement) as being unalterably opposed to the expansion of slavery in the U.S. territories. Republicans hoped for the eventual eradication of slavery but thought that this would be impossible if it were allowed to spread, as the decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (goaded by hopes that the Supreme Court might solve the issue once and for all) suggested that it could. Indeed, Abraham Lincoln, who would be the party's first successful presidential candidate, argued that "a house divided against itself cannot stand." This, in turn, propelled him into a series of statewide debates with Stephen A. Douglas in Illinois for the U.S. Senate seat. Although the state legislature appointed Douglas to the Senate seat, the debates elevated Lincoln as the leading intellectual spokesman for the Republican Party.

The presidential election of 1860, like that of 1824, featured four primary candidates. Only because Democrats split their votes among a northern and a southern candidate, with some votes going to John Bell in the Constitutional Union Party, was Lincoln able to eke out an Electoral College victory, but that left many southern states fearing the worst. Although Lincoln had made it clear that he did not consider it to be his job to eradicate slavery in the states where it already existed, southerners often heard the shriller voices of those who demanded immediate abolition and of those like Rowan Helper of North Carolina, who attempted

to array non-slaveholding whites against slaveholding planters and who even proposed using the taxing power to eliminate slavery.

Outgoing president and Democrat James Buchanan pled with southern states to remain in the Union but did not think he had power, absent congressionally delegated authority, to do anything to stop them from seceding. For his part, Lincoln, who thought both that the Union was perpetual and that his oath of office required him to defend it at all costs, promised that he would not take rash actions. A congressional committee sought first to craft a compromise that would equal that which had kept the nation together in 1850. Congress eventually settled on a single amendment (the Corwin Amendment) that would guarantee that the national government would never interfere with the institution in states where it was already in place, but it threatened to perpetuate slavery forever, and it came too late.

Sadly, Lincoln's rhetoric in his first inaugural address, although even more elevated and passionate than that of his predecessor, was unable to keep the nation together. As the South drafted a new constitution, its vice president, Alexander Stephens, openly proclaimed that it was built on the cornerstone of human inequality and on the proposition that slavery was a positive good. One can only wonder what he, or Lincoln, or any of the northerners or southerners who had fought in the previous 30 years over the return of fugitive slaves, slavery within the District of Columbia, the admission of new slave states, and slavery in the territories would have thought of modern partisans who proclaim that the Civil War was not about slavery!

Assessment

The greatest tragedy of this period is that the nation proved unable either to eliminate slavery or to avert war. One might further bemoan the continuing mistreatment of Native Americans

and the seemingly glacial pace at which women's rights appeared to be progressing. Few could have anticipated that Lincoln's inauguration would lead to a war that would bring about the most important changes to the U.S. Constitution since it was drafted in 1787. Even fewer might have anticipated the manner in which the rights of due process and equal protection would go beyond the issue of race to embrace sex and other categorizations previously largely taken for granted.

As I began this project, I was familiar with a large majority of the documents that are contained in this volume, but there were a good many that I had never previously actually read, at least not recently, until I began work on this book, and I found some of them to be particularly enlightening. I found Andrew Jackson no longer to be as appealing as the proponent of popular democracy whom I remember studying in my youth. I continued to regard James K. Polk as an expansionist, but (however grateful I am to have Texas and New Mexico in our current Union) I no longer saw this as quite the unmitigated blessing that I once did. Although readings reminded me that Abraham Lincoln continued to favor recolonization of U.S. slaves long after others had seen their way to complete abolitionism within the nation, I recognized how much more advanced his position was when comparing him to Stephen A. Douglas and others from his time who issued far more blatant appeals to racism.

Other readers of this book will undoubtedly make their own assessments and come away with their own evaluations and insights. The beauty of this series is that it enables teachers, students, professors, and citizens to make their own judgments.

One of the most difficult choices that I faced in doing this work was trying to choose and edit entries so that they represented not only the loudest voices but also a variety of perspectives from the period and so that they could reasonably fit within a single accessible volume. I had to omit many documents and many choice passages simply to keep the book manageable. Teachers might find it productive to quiz their own students on what documents they would add. There are a large number of voices from which to choose.

Acknowledgments

I continue to be part of a great college within a great university where I have support from students, colleagues, administrators, and members of the community. It is such an honor to be able to draw from the depth of scholarship and be part of larger academic debates within the community of historians, law professors, and political scientists. Now that my wife is retired (at least from an outside job), we have been able to travel to more conferences together, and she has been able to provide even more emotional support than before. I remain ever so grateful for this continuing encouragement and that of my family.

I remain particularly grateful to librarians at MTSU who helped me locate sources and to editors at ABC-CLIO, especially Michael Millman and Robin Tutt, and to Silverander Communications for the cover design.

John R. Vile
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The Jacksonian and Antebellum Eras

SECTION I

The Jackson Years

A Strict and Faithful Economy

Andrew Jackson's First Inaugural Address

March 4, 1829

INTRODUCTION

Few presidents have made a bigger impression on the institution of the presidency than Andrew Jackson, who served as the seventh president from 1829 to 1837. Jackson, who was known for his fierce temper and sometimes seemed larger than life, had chiefly distinguished himself in wars against Native Americans and in the conflict with the English at the Battle of New Orleans in 1816. As president, Jackson believed that he was the only individual who represented the people as a whole. Known as a man of the people, his administration would be known as one that elevated the common man and that increased suffrage, at least for white men. His inaugural address was followed by a raucous gathering at the White House, where order was finally restored when the alcohol was moved to the lawn.

Fellow-Citizens:

About to undertake the arduous duties that I have been appointed to perform by the choice of a free people, I avail myself of this customary and solemn occasion to express the gratitude which their confidence inspires and to acknowledge the accountability which my situation enjoins. While the magnitude of their interests convinces me that no thanks can be adequate to the honor they have conferred, it admonishes me that the best return I can make is the zealous dedication of my humble abilities to their service and their good.

As the instrument of the Federal Constitution it will devolve on me for a stated period to execute the laws of the United States, to superintend their foreign and their confederate relations, to manage their revenue, to command their forces, and, by communications to the Legislature, to watch over and to promote their interests generally. And the principles of action by which I shall endeavor to accomplish this circle of duties it is now proper for me briefly to explain.

¹A strong president does not necessarily mean a despotic presidency. Jackson believed in the vigorous but constitutional exercise of executive powers.

²Although Jackson is today remembered as a strong nationalist, as he entered the presidency, he was clearly sympathetic to states' rights.

³Jackson followed Thomas Jefferson and other early presidents in touting fiscal responsibility. The problem of increasing federal deficits is largely a 20th- and 21st-century phenomenon.

In administering the laws of Congress I shall keep steadily in view the limitations as well as the extent of the Executive power trusting thereby to discharge the functions of my office without transcending its authority.¹ With foreign nations it will be my study to preserve peace and to cultivate friendship on fair and honorable terms, and in the adjustment of any differences that may exist or arise to exhibit the forbearance becoming a powerful nation rather than the sensibility belonging to a gallant people.

In such measures as I may be called on to pursue in regard to the rights of the separate States I hope to be animated by a proper respect for those sovereign members of our Union, taking care not to confound the powers they have reserved to themselves with those they have granted to the Confederacy.²

The management of the public revenue—that searching operation in all governments—is among the most delicate and important trusts in ours, and it will, of course, demand no inconsiderable share of my official solicitude. Under every aspect in which it can be considered it would appear that advantage must result from the observance of a strict and faithful economy.³ This I shall aim at the more anxiously both because it will facilitate the extinguishment of the national debt, the unnecessary duration of which is incompatible with real independence, and because it will counteract that tendency to public and private profligacy which a profuse expenditure of money by the Government is but too apt to engender. Powerful auxiliaries to the attainment of this desirable end are to be found in the regulations provided by the wisdom of Congress for the specific appropriation of public money and the prompt accountability of public officers.

With regard to a proper selection of the subjects of impost with a view to revenue, it would seem to me that the spirit of equity, caution and compromise in which the Constitution was formed requires that the great interests of agriculture, commerce, and manufactures should be equally favored, and that perhaps the only exception to this rule should consist in the peculiar encouragement of any products of either of them that may be found essential to our national independence.

Internal improvement and the diffusion of knowledge, so far as they can be promoted by the constitutional acts of the Federal Government, are of high importance.

Considering standing armies as dangerous to free governments in time of peace, I shall not seek to enlarge our present establishment, nor disregard that salutary lesson of political experience which teaches that the military should be held subordinate to the civil power. The gradual increase of our Navy, whose flag has displayed in distant climes our skill in navigation and our fame in arms; the preservation of our forts, arsenals, and dockyards, and the introduction of progressive improvements in the discipline and science of both branches of our military service are so plainly prescribed by prudence that I should be excused for omitting their mention sooner than for enlarging on their importance. But the bulwark of our defense is the national militia, which in the present state of our intelligence and population must render us invincible. As long as our Government is administered for the good of the people, and is regulated by their will; as long as it secures to us the rights of person and of property, liberty of conscience and of the press, it will be worth defending; and so long as it is worth defending a patriotic militia will cover it with an impenetrable aegis. Partial injuries and occasional mortifications we may be subjected to, but a million of armed freemen, possessed of the means of war, can never be conquered by a foreign foe. To any just system, therefore, calculated to strengthen this natural safeguard of the country I shall cheerfully lend all the aid in my power.

It will be my sincere and constant desire to observe toward the Indian tribes within our limits a just and liberal policy, and to give that humane and considerate attention to their rights and their wants which is consistent with the habits of our Government and the feelings of our people.⁴

⁴This sentiment seems neither consistent with Jackson's prior actions as a military commander nor with his subsequent policy of Indian removal.

The recent demonstration of public sentiment inscribes on the list of Executive duties, in characters too legible to be overlooked, the task of reform, which will require particularly the correction of those abuses that have brought the patronage of the Federal Government into conflict with the freedom of elections, and the counteraction of those causes which have disturbed the rightful course of appointment and have placed or continued power in unfaithful or incompetent hands.

In the performance of a task thus generally delineated I shall endeavor to select men whose diligence and talents will insure in their respective stations able and faithful cooperation, depending for

the advancement of the public service more on the integrity and zeal of the public officers than on their numbers.

A diffidence, perhaps too just, in my own qualifications will teach me to look with reverence to the examples of public virtue left by my illustrious predecessors, and with veneration to the lights that flow from the mind that founded and the mind that reformed our system. The same diffidence induces me to hope for instruction and aid from the coordinate branches of the Government, and for the indulgence and support of my fellow-citizens generally. And a firm reliance on the goodness of that Power whose providence mercifully protected our national infancy, and has since upheld our liberties in various vicissitudes, encourages me to offer up my ardent supplications that He will continue to make our beloved country the object of His divine care and gracious benediction.

Source: James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, Vol. 2. New York: Bureau of National Literature, 1897.

Benevolence or Humanity

Catharine Beecher's Circular Letter

December 1, 1829

INTRODUCTION

Although the Beecher family is most commonly associated with the anti-slavery movement, Catharine Beecher (1800–1878), sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, a Connecticut schoolteacher, who wrote extensively on the role of women in the United States, issued the following circular (a message appearing on a single page) protesting America's Indian removal policy.

Addressed to benevolent Ladies of the U. States.

The present crisis in the affairs of the Indian nations in the United States demands the immediate and interested attention of all who make any claims to benevolence or humanity . . .

The following are facts of the case: This continent was once possessed only by the Indians, and earliest accounts represent them as a race numerous, warlike, and powerful. When our forefathers sought refuge from oppression on these shores, this people supplied their necessities, and ministered to their comfort; and though some of them, when they saw the white man continually encroaching upon their land, fought bravely for their existence and their country, yet often, too, the Indian has shed his blood to protect and sustain our infant nation . . .

Ever since the existence of this nation, our general government, pursuing the course alike of policy and benevolence, have acknowledged these people as free and independent nations, and has protected them in the quiet possession of their lands. **In repeated treaties with the Indians, the United States, by the hands of the most distinguished statesmen, after purchasing the greater part of their best lands, have promised them “to continue the guarantee of the remainder of their**

¹Beecher reminds the nations of past treaties that guaranteed Native American lands.

country FOR EVER.”¹ And so strictly has government guarded the Indian’s right to his lands, that even to go on to their boundaries to survey the land, subjects to heavy fines and imprisonment . . .

But the lands of this people are claimed to be embraced within the limits of some of our southern states, and as they are fertile and valuable they are demanded by the whites as their own possessions, and efforts are making to dispossess the Indians of their native soil. And such is the singular state of concurring circumstances, that it has become almost a certainty that these people are to have their lands torn from them, and to be driven into western wilds and to final annihilation, unless the feelings of a humane and Christian nation shall be aroused to prevent the unhallowed sacrifice . . .

Unless our general government interferes to protect these nations, as by solemn and oft-repeated treaties they are bound to do, nothing can save them. The states which surround them are taking such measures as will speedily drive them from their country, and cause their final extinction.

By enactments recently passed in some of these states it is decided that the laws of these states shall be extended over the Indian territory in the course of the next year (1830). And the following specimen of their laws will show what will be the fate of the Indian when they take effect . . .

A small tract of wild and uncultivated land has been apportioned to them principally beyond the Arkansas—a territory found by examination to be deficient both in wood and water, which are articles of indispensable necessity to emigrants and from whence the Indians who have been persuaded to depart, are returning with dissatisfied complaints. To this wild and unpromising resort it is proposed to remove 60,000 people, of all ages, sexes, and condition; to break up all their existing social, political, and religious associations; to expose them to the hunger, nakedness, sickness, and distress of a long and fatiguing journey through unfrequented wilds; to crowd into this narrow space different tribes, speaking divers languages, and accustomed to different habits of life; and to place them under the government of white agents, to be appointed by government. Here they are expected to take up their residence, with no other hope than that when they have made their lands valuable by cultivation, they again

must be driven into still more distant wilds; for if our government cannot fulfill its treaties, and protect them now, well they know it could not do it then. Is the thing possible, that these 60,000 Indians can thus be stripped of all they hold dear on earth, and in direct violation of oft-repeated treaties, and yet quietly and unresistingly submit to such oppression and robbery? Does not the very statement show that in effecting this wicked project, the “voice of our brothers’ blood” would cry unto God from this guilty land?²

²Beecher outlines the injustice of national policy and ends with an appeal to Christian values.

Source: Catharine Beecher, “Circular Addressed to Benevolent Ladies of the U. States.” Printed in *Christian Advocate and Journal*, December 25, 1829, 65–66 (American Periodical Series, 1800–1850, Microfilm, Reel 1749).

The South Carolina Doctrine

Robert Hayne's Second Speech on Foot's Resolution

January 21, 1830

INTRODUCTION

One of the most vigorous debates of the early 19th century took place in the U.S. Senate over a resolution introduced by Senator Foot of Connecticut proposing to consider limiting the sale of public lands (such sales increased federal revenues) in the West. This resolution exposed powerful divisions among the western, northeastern, and southern states over issues as diverse as the desirability and constitutionality of internal improvements, tariffs, and slavery. Debaters dredged up examples of past behaviors from the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, through the Missouri Compromise, through the tariff controversies designed to show selfishness and ill will of each of these divisions.

Sticking to a strict construction of the Constitution, South Carolina's Robert Hayne (who was repeating arguments by Vice President John C. Calhoun, who would himself soon become a South Carolina senator) argued for the right of a single state to nullify federal laws. He sought support for this doctrine in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, which James Madison and Thomas Jefferson had secretly authored in response to the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798.

Although this book will feature selections only from Hayne and from Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, many other senators, including Missouri's Thomas Hart Benton, took part in this far-reaching debate that portentously foreshadowed controversies that would eventuate in the Civil War.

¹At least in certain respects, Hayne shows that he is an ideological descendant of Thomas Jefferson, who advocated conservative fiscal policies and opposed Alexander Hamilton's plan to establish a national bank, which was specifically aimed at garnering support for the new government from the manufacturing and mercantile class.

Sir, let me tell that gentleman, that the south repudiates the idea that a *pecuniary dependence* on the federal government is one of the legitimate means of holding the states together. A moneyed interest in the government is essentially a base interest; and just so far as it operates to bind the feelings of those who are subjected to it to the government,—just so far as it operates in creating sympathies and interests that would not otherwise exist,—is it opposed to all the principles of free government, and at war with virtue and patriotism. Sir, the link which binds the public creditors, *as such*, to their

country, binds them equally to all governments, whether arbitrary or free. In a free government, this principle of abject dependence, if extended through all the ramifications of society, must be fatal to liberty. Already have we made alarming strides in that direction. The entire class of manufacturers, the holders of stocks, with their hundreds of millions of capital, are held to the government by the strong link of *pecuniary interests*; millions of people—entire sections of country, interested, or believing themselves to be so, in the public lands, and the public treasure—are bound to the government by the expectation of *pecuniary favors*. If this system is carried much further, no man can fail to see that every generous motive of attachment to the country will be destroyed, and in its place will spring up those low, grovelling, base, and selfish feelings which bind men to the footstool of a despot by bonds as strong and enduring as those which attach them to free institutions. Sir, I would lay the foundation of this government in the affections of the people—I would teach them to cling to it by dispensing equal justice, and above all, by securing the “blessings of liberty” to “themselves and to their posterity.”¹

... [Hayne takes issue with Webster’s belief that differences between the wealth of Ohio and Kentucky are the result of one being a free state and the other a slave one.]

We are ready to make up the issue with the gentleman, as to the influence of slavery on individual or national character—on the prosperity and greatness, either of the United States or of particular states. Sir, when arraigned before the bar of public opinion, on this charge of slavery, we can stand up with conscious rectitude, plead not guilty, and put ourselves upon God and our country. Sir, we will not consent to look at slavery in the abstract. We will not stop to inquire whether the black man, as some philosophers have contended, is of an inferior race, nor whether his color and condition are the effects of a curse inflicted for the offences of his ancestors. We deal in no *abstractions*. We will not look back to inquire whether our fathers were guiltless in introducing slaves into this country. If an inquiry should ever be instituted in these matters, however, it will be found that the profits of the slave trade were not confined to the south. Southern ships and southern sailors were not the instruments of bringing slaves to the shores of America, nor did our merchants reap the profits of that “accursed traffic.”²

²Southern apologists for slavery often pointed out that northern merchants had been active participants in the slave trade, just as, in an earlier period, American revolutionaries had often blamed slavery on the British.

³Hayne, like earlier slavery apologists, portrayed southern slave owners as the victims of a system that they inherited and that God had ordained. Hayne feared that the consequences of emancipation would be greater than any disabilities that slaves suffered and argued that slaves were still better off than they would be if they were back in Africa (some early anti-slavery movements had concentrated on plans to repatriate slaves on the African continent).

⁴Although Webster had repeated charges against slavery similar to those that delegates to the Constitutional Convention had made, Hayne takes great offense at what he believed to be an aspersion on the southern states. Hayne contrasts what he believes was the very practical southern response with what he believes to be the utopian hopes of abolitionists.

But, sir, we will pass over all this. If slavery, as it now exists in this country, be an evil, we of the present day *found it ready made to our hands*. Finding our lot cast among a people whom God had manifestly committed to our care, we did not sit down to speculate on abstract questions of theoretical liberty. We met it as a practical question of *obligation and duty*. We resolved to make the best of the situation in which Providence had placed us, and to fulfil the high trusts which had devolved upon us as the owners of slaves, in the only way in which such a trust could be fulfilled, without spreading misery and ruin throughout the land. We found that we had to deal with a people whose physical, moral, and intellectual habits and character totally disqualified them from the enjoyment of the blessings of freedom. We could not send them back to the shores from whence their fathers had been taken; their numbers forbade the thought, even if we did not know that their condition here is infinitely preferable to what it possibly could be among the barren sands and savage tribes of Africa; and it was wholly irreconcilable with all our notions of humanity to tear asunder the tender ties which they had formed among us, to gratify the feelings of a false philanthropy.³

What a commentary on the wisdom, justice, and humanity of the southern slave owner is presented by the example of certain benevolent associations and charitable individuals *elsewhere!* Shedding weak tears over sufferings which had existence in their own sickly imaginations, these “friends of humanity” set themselves systematically to work to seduce the slaves of the south from their masters. By means of missionaries and political tracts, the scheme was in a great measure successful. Thousands of these deluded victims of fanaticism were seduced into the enjoyment of freedom in our northern cities. And what has been the consequence? Go to these cities now and ask the question. Visit the dark and narrow lanes, and obscure recesses, which have been assigned by common consent as the abodes of those outcasts of the world, the free people of color. Sir, there does not exist, on the face of the whole earth, a population so poor, so wretched, so vile, so loathsome, so utterly destitute of all the comforts, conveniences, and decencies of life, as the unfortunate blacks of Philadelphia, and New York, and Boston. Liberty has been to them the greatest of calamities, the heaviest of curses. Sir, I have had some opportunities of making comparison between the condition of the free negroes of the north and the slaves of the south, and the comparison has left not only an indelible impression of the

superior advantages of the latter, but has gone far to reconcile me to slavery itself. Never have I felt so forcibly that touching description, “the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head,” as when I have seen this unhappy race, naked and houseless, almost starving in the streets, and abandoned by all the world. Sir, I have seen in the neighborhood of one of the most moral, religious, and refined cities of the north, a family of free blacks, driven to the caves of the rocks, and there obtaining a precarious subsistence from charity and plunder. . . .⁴

There is a *spirit*, which, like the father of evil, is constantly “walking to and fro about the earth, seeking whom it may devour:” it is the spirit of FALSE PHILANTHROPY. The persons whom it possesses do not indeed throw themselves into the flames, but they are employed in lighting up the torches of discord throughout the community. Their first principle of action is to leave their own affairs, and neglect their own duties, to regulate the affairs and duties of others. Theirs is the task to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, of other lands, while they thrust the naked, famished, and shivering beggar from their own doors; to instruct the heathen, while their own children want the bread of life. When this spirit infuses itself into the bosom of a statesman, (if one so possessed can be called a statesman,) it converts him at once into a visionary enthusiast. Then it is that he indulges in golden dreams of national greatness and prosperity. He discovers that “liberty is power,” and not content with vast schemes of improvement at home, which it would bankrupt the treasury of the world to execute, he flies to foreign lands, to fulfil obligations to “the human race” by inculcating the principles of “political and religious liberty,” and promoting the “general welfare” of the whole human race. It is a spirit which has long been busy with the *slaves of the south*; and is even now displaying itself in vain efforts to drive the government from its wise policy in relation to the *Indians*. It is this spirit which has filled the land with thousands of wild and visionary projects, which can have no effect but to waste the energies and dissipate the resources of the country. It is the spirit of which the aspiring politician dexterously avails himself, when, by inscribing on his banner the magical words LIBERTY and PHILANTHROPY, he draws to his support that class of persons who are ready to bow down at the very name of their idols.

But, sir, whatever difference of opinion may exist as to the effect of slavery on national wealth and prosperity, if we may trust to