

STUDY GUIDE: THE NULLIFICATION CRISIS

1. Background

The Nullification Crisis was a major political conflict in the United States during the early 1830s. It centered on the struggle between federal authority and states' rights, especially whether a state could nullify or invalidate a federal law within its borders.

2. The Tariff Issue

The conflict began when Congress passed the Tariff of 1828, called the "Tariff of Abominations" by Southern states. Southerners believed the tariff unfairly favored Northern industry and harmed Southern agricultural exports.

3. South Carolina's Opposition

South Carolina argued that states had the right to nullify unconstitutional federal laws. Led by John C. Calhoun, South Carolina claimed the tariff violated states' rights and threatened secession if the federal government attempted enforcement.

4. Andrew Jackson's Response

President Andrew Jackson strongly opposed nullification. He declared that the Union must be preserved and threatened to use military force if South Carolina resisted federal law. Congress passed the Force Bill, allowing Jackson to use armed force if necessary.

5. The Compromise Tariff

To prevent conflict, Henry Clay negotiated the Compromise Tariff of 1833, which gradually lowered tariff rates. South Carolina backed down but maintained its stance on states' rights by symbolically nullifying the Force Bill.

6. Significance

The Nullification Crisis was an early warning sign of growing tension between the federal government and Southern states. It previewed conflicts that would later contribute to the Civil War. The crisis highlighted enduring debates about constitutional powers, federal authority, and state sovereignty.

Key Idea: The Nullification Crisis showed that disagreements over states' rights and federal authority could threaten the unity of the nation, foreshadowing future divisions.