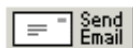


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SIRS DISCOVERER
April 11, 2002, n.p.

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John C. Calhoun (1782-1850)

Politician

John C. Calhoun saw Civil War coming. The North and South are "so different and hostile," he wrote. "It is difficult to see how they can exist together...."

Calhoun and America grew up together in the early 1800s. As the nation added more free states than slave states, **Calhoun** saw the balance of power shift to the North. By the end of his life, he knew that his country and his beloved South Carolina could not survive together.

Growing Up

Life on the frontier was dangerous and hard for the Calhouns. Religion kept the family strong. Patrick taught his son **John** about God, farming and politics. He believed in states' rights. No one outside South Carolina, he felt, should tax his state or make its laws.

Education

John Caldwell Calhoun did not need books to understand his father's words. Still, he longed for an education. He loved farming but he loved learning, too. At age eight, he briefly attended a small country school. At thirteen, he attended his brother-in-law's school.

Calhoun entered Yale University in 1802. The serious young man worried that his early schooling would not meet Yale's standards. But soon his brilliance shone through. His professors noticed. One of them predicted that **Calhoun** would become president of the United States. **Calhoun** agreed. After college, he studied law at Litchfield Law School and with South Carolina lawyers.

Career

Calhoun practiced law briefly. His real interest was politics. South Carolinians voted him into the state legislature in 1808. In 1810 they sent him to the United States House of Representatives. He joined a group of politicians called the War Hawks. Led by Henry Clay, these men wanted war. England supported Indian raids. Its ships detained American sailors at sea. Clay and **Calhoun** felt war would teach England to respect America.

The War Hawks got their wish. The U.S. eventually won the War of 1812. But it began badly. The English burnt Washington, D.C. to the ground. Afterwards, **Calhoun** supported a stronger army and navy. He worked to expand the armed forces. He approved funds to build forts and military schools. He voted for a tariff, a foreign tax that strengthened American industry. He proposed a system of roads and canals to connect the growing country. He planned a national bank that later grew into the Treasury Department. In 1817, he became Secretary of War.

In these ways, **John C. Calhoun** served the whole country. But he loved South Carolina best. He balanced the needs of the nation and state. He wanted all voters to like him--and elect him president. He tried and failed twice to reach that office. Instead, he served as vice president under presidents **John Quincy Adams** and **Andrew Jackson**. He was also Secretary of State.

The Beginning of the End

In its early years, the United States had an equal number of free states and slave states. The South needed slaves to work on huge farms called plantations. The North did not. Some Northerners opposed slavery and tried to stop it. **Calhoun** and other Southerners felt they had no right to object. The North used its power to add new states to the country--states without slavery. Southerners objected. Henry Clay worked out a compromise. The South would accept California as a free state and would give up slavery in Washington, D.C. The North would allow Utah and New Mexico to choose slavery when they became states.

Calhoun rejected this compromise. He felt that the nation was forcing Southern states to follow policies that harmed them. He came up with a legal argument called "nullification." If a nation makes laws that harm a state, it nullifies, or cancels out, its right to govern that state. Nullification became the South's legal reason for leaving the union.

Calhoun had become old and ill. Still, he came to Congress one last time to share his ideas. Too weak to read his speech, **Calhoun** listened as another senator read his words. The time had come for North and South to part, he said. Would the North let the South leave in peace, or would there be war?

Personal Life

Calhoun died without an answer to his question. The Civil War did not begin until twelve years after his death. The war ended slavery in America forever.

Until that time, the **Calhoun** family owned slaves. Slaves helped Patrick **Calhoun** clear the frontier. They served the wealthy family of **John Calhoun's** wife, Floride. The couple raised their children on a plantation where they, too, owned slaves.

Calhoun's views about slavery are not popular today. Still, even his enemies admired him. He is remembered as one the nation's most honorable leaders. He debated his views with skill, intelligence and calm logic.

He lost his cause, but he earned his nation's lasting respect.

Important Events

1782: Born March 18th.

1804: Graduates Yale and enters law school.

1807: Begins law practice.

1808: Begins political career as state legislator.

1810: Serves as U.S. representative for South Carolina.

1817: Serves as Secretary of War.

1824: Loses presidential election and serves as vice president.

1832: Resigns vice presidency and serves as U.S. senator for South Carolina.

1844: Loses presidential election; serves as Secretary of State.

1845: Resigns as Secretary of State to serve South Carolina in the senate.

1850: Dies on March 31st.

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"John C. Calhoun (1782-1850)." *SIRS Discoverer*. 11 Apr 2002: n.p. *SIRS Discoverer*.
Web. 06 Mar 2013.

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