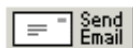


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Webster, Daniel

(1782–1852). On Jan. 26 and 27, 1830, the United States Senate heard one of the greatest speeches ever delivered before it. **Daniel Webster**, senator from Massachusetts, made it in answer to Senator Robert Young Hayne of South Carolina. The issue was the nullification controversy. Hayne, a confederate of John C. Calhoun, had said that the federal government was a mere confederation of states and that the states could refuse to obey any laws passed by the Congress (see [Calhoun](#)). **Webster** refuted Hayne's notion of "Liberty first and Union afterwards" with the memorable words, "Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!" It placed **Webster** in the front rank of American orators and won him enduring fame for statesmanship.

Webster was born on Jan. 18, 1782, in Salisbury, N.H. He was so frail as a child that he was the only member of his pioneer family who was exempt from hard labor. His mother, an uncommonly intelligent woman, early discovered the boy's remarkable mental powers. She taught him all she knew and insisted that he enter the Exeter Academy at 14. When he was 15 he entered Dartmouth College. After graduating from Dartmouth, he taught in an academy until he could send his brother Ezekiel to college.

Webster was admitted to the Boston bar in 1805. So shy as a child that he could not stand in school to speak pieces, **Webster** soon became famous for his eloquence at the bar. At the age of 30 he was elected to the House of Representatives from New Hampshire. After remaining there for four years, he retired to return to the Boston bar. His income soon rose to \$20,000, a great sum in those days. His reputation became national with his winning of the famous Dartmouth College charter case. This Supreme Court decision asserted the authority of the federal government over the states and was a blow to the theory of states' rights.

In 1823 **Webster** was again in the House of Representatives, this time from Massachusetts. In 1827 the legislature of that state chose him to represent Massachusetts in the Senate. There he remained until his death in 1852 except while serving as secretary of state under presidents William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, and Millard Fillmore. While in this office he negotiated the **Webster-Ashburton Treaty** with Great Britain, signed in 1842, which settled the Maine boundary dispute.

It was during the presidency of Andrew Jackson that the tariff issue arose. Manufacturing interests in the North favored high tariffs, while Southern agriculturalists wanted low tariffs. Jackson was against his vice-president, John C. Calhoun, who brilliantly stated the right of states to nullify federal laws. **Webster** was on Jackson's side, but the two were never close. And on the matter of a national bank, they disagreed completely. Webster's desire to succeed Jackson in the White House was thwarted by the president, who

promoted Martin Van Buren.

Webster opposed the Mexican War and the adding of any more territory to the United States. After the war, however, he became involved in the sectional crisis concerning slavery in the new territories gained from Mexico. He supported Henry Clay's compromise proposals, one of which would organize the territories with no prohibition of slavery. He argued that the West was unsuitable for plantation slavery (see [Compromise of 1850](#)). For his support of compromise he was roundly condemned by antislavery factions. The poet John Greenleaf Whittier memorialized this denunciation in his poem 'Ichabod'.

Historians recognize that Webster's support of Clay's compromise legislation postponed the Civil War for ten years. **Webster** feared slavery less than the prospect of disunion, a view with which Abraham Lincoln agreed. As secretary of state under Fillmore from 1850 to 1852, his enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law further enraged abolitionists. It was his espousal of nationalism and his willingness to compromise on slavery that cost him any chance for the presidency during the period after 1840. **Webster** remained as secretary of state until the condition of his health became so critical that he was forced to resign. He returned to his home in Marshfield, Mass., where he died on Oct. 24, 1852.

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